

DONALD TRUMP, THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE CHURCH

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1. Introduction

The result of the presidential election in the United States is likely to have a major impact on the environment. The election of Donald Trump has been a shock to many of us and will have implications for environmental policy. Since the election there have been a multiplicity of articles concerning the future of environmental protection under Trump. Some of these have painted a very grim, even apocalyptic, picture of the future. Environment certainly does not seem to be high on his agenda. As an editorial for the Los Angeles Times, published on the 22nd November 2016, pointed out, ‘To see how seriously Donald J. Trump takes the health of the environment, you need look no further than his transition team’s website.’¹ Environmental issues aren’t even listed - though there is a page pledging to achieve ‘energy independence’....² But, as we shall see, others are wondering whether he will be able to enact his policies, given the level of opposition he is likely to have, the economic trends that are already set in, and the general inertia in the political and legislative system.



Donald Trump

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The biggest problem in analysing the effects of Trump on the environment is that, like on many other issues, he tends to flip-flop his positions frequently. His views tend to change depending on his intended audience, and the people around him. The second problem in conducting this analysis is that views on the effects of his policies vary widely. Here I have tried to avoid the most extreme interpretations on either side, or at least to give a balance. My aim is to give a reasonably complete summary

of the likely effects of a Trump administration on the environment, and then look at what this all means for the Church.

2. Free Markets and Climate Denial in the United States

Before we look in detail at Trump and his policies it is important to set the overall context. Much of that context revolves around extreme free market economics and climate scepticism. The main arguments concerning the free market were outlined in Naomi Klein's book *This Changes Everything*.³ Essentially those who take free market economics to its extreme conclusion are opposed to 'big government' and regulations, particularly if they threaten profits. This may or may not be a good thing in other areas, but it is very bad news for the environment. The environment becomes what is known as an 'externality', something of no economic worth. If we are to tackle climate change and other environmental issues then legislation is needed both at the national and international levels. So climate change would 'change everything' if people were persuaded that it was true, and that the future of humanity was in serious danger unless it was tackled. Those holding to extreme free market thinking cannot allow climate change to be 'true'. This is why we have climate scepticism and why there is a huge industry behind it. Early in 2015, Hodson and Hodson produced a Grove Booklet, *The Ethics of Climatic Scepticism*, in which they traced scepticism in the general public to the influence of sceptical media, which was in turn financed directly or indirectly by the fossil fuel industry and supporters of the free market.⁴ By the time of the Paris Climate Change meeting in December 2015 climate scepticism seemed to have been marginalised, and it had far less effect than on the Copenhagen meeting in 2009.⁵ However, with the election of Trump scepticism is on the rise again, particularly in the United States.⁶ As we shall see in Section 9 below many of Trump's nominees for high positions in his administration hold sceptic views. It seems that a new brand of extreme free market economics with the associated climate scepticism has now taken over the United States government.

3. Trump and Climate Change

Trump is often presented as an ardent climate sceptic, and it is true that the majority of his more recent pronouncements have given that impression. However, this has not always been the case, and even now his position is not totally clear. If we go back to 2009, Trump was a signatory to a letter that called for Congress and President Obama to take urgent action to 'invest in a clean energy economy'. This, the letter hoped, would 'spur economic growth, create new energy jobs, and increase our energy security all while reducing the harmful emissions that are putting our planet at risk.'⁷ Soon after signing this letter his opinion seemed to change, and by 6th November 2012 he tweeted, 'The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive.'⁸ During the presidential election campaign Trump mostly took a very hard-line sceptic stance, but in one of the presidential debates with Hillary Clinton (26th September 2016) he did appear to deny that he had ever said that climate change was a hoax invented by China.⁹

However, since Trump's election on 9th November 2016 his stance on climate change has shown some signs of changing again. On 22nd November he met with journalists from the *New York*

Times to discuss a range of issues, including climate change. One of the journalists, Mike Grynbaum, tweeted ‘Does Trump think human activity is linked to climate change? ‘I think there is some connectivity. Some, something. It depends on how much.’¹⁰ This apparent softening of his position on climate change was then rapidly pounced upon by Reince Priebus, Trump’s chief of staff, and a very committed climate sceptic. He explained, ‘As far as this issue on climate change- the only thing he [Trump] was saying after being asked a few questions about it is, look, he’ll have an open mind about it but he has his default position, which is most of it is a bunch of bunk, but he’ll have an open mind and listen to people.’¹¹

Perhaps one of the most surprising developments since Trump’s election was his meeting with former US Vice-President, Al Gore, the climate campaigner on 5th December 2016.¹² The meeting was apparently brokered by Trump’s daughter, Ivanka, and its contents are shrouded in secrecy. As he emerged from seeing the Trumps, all Gore said was that he had an, ‘an extremely interesting conversation’ with Donald Trump on climate change. It appears that Ivanka Trump has considerable influence over her father, and that she holds some political positions closer to those of the Democrats. Her intervention on climate change prompted Andrew Eil to write an impassioned open letter to Ivanka Trump in the *New York Observer*.¹³ The publisher of this newspaper is Jared Kushner who is Ivanka Trump’s husband (and another key advisor to Donald Trump), so we can be sure that Ivanka read it, and possibly even approved it before publication. What exactly was going on here is unclear, but Eil’s conclusion was very much to the point, ‘But if he [Trump] surprises people and you [Ivanka] help him become an unexpected climate champion, not just the liberals, but the global community, and the planet you leave to your children, will be very grateful.’ Although this does appear somewhat more promising than expected, we should remember that Trump’s transition team, and his appointees to various key roles in his administration, almost entirely hold climate sceptic opinions (see Section 9 below). Some have viewed this whole incident with scepticism, thinking that it might just be an elaborate smoke screen to confuse liberal environmentalists.¹⁴ However, Dana Nuccitelli has portrayed it as a battle for Donald Trump’s soul, with Ivanka on one side and his advisors and administration on the other.¹⁵ Will Ivanka Trump be able to overrule the influence of all these powerful individuals?

4. Trump and the Paris Agreement

“The biggest danger, to my mind, is the possibility that a Republican president might be elected next year in the United States. If that happens they will almost certainly begin to unravel Obama’s climate change policies, and then the whole COP21 agreement could be endangered.” I wrote this in a special JRI briefing which was published on 13th December 2015, the day after the world’s governments adopted a historic climate change agreement at the COP21 meeting in Paris.¹⁶ The agreement was ratified with remarkable haste and entered force on 4th November 2016. The United States was a signatory. With the election of Trump on a Republican ticket where does the USA stand now?

During the election campaign Trump said that he would like to ‘cancel’ the Paris Agreement.¹⁷ He would particularly like the United States to stop payment into United Nations climate funds. One nation on its own, even the United States, cannot cancel the whole Agreement. To disengage from the Agreement will not be easy, and it could take several years. However, it seems possible that the Trump administration may be looking at the possibility of opting out entirely from the UN process, and withdrawing from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).¹⁸ This might only take one year, and offers a quick way out of the Paris Agreement if Trump wished to achieve this objective. Jody Freeman, a Harvard law school professor and former climate adviser to Obama, thinks this is unlikely: ‘The problem is that the UNFCCC was a treaty unanimously ratified by Congress [in 1992], there was no real dissent, and it was negotiated by a Republican president.’ Freeman pointed out that the UNFCCC has no substantive obligations in it and that it would not make sense to withdraw from this convention. Moreover it would upset the United States’ allies and is not needed to undermine the Paris Agreement. Freeman went on to say, ‘What Trump could much more easily do is simply not meet the US pledge for Paris. Or he can just say, ‘I’m not going to be bound by that pledge, and I’m going to take apart the key programs domestically that were supposed to get us there, like the Clean Power Plan.’¹⁹



Beijing, China

If the United States pulls out of the Paris Agreement, China may gain extra influence

Since his election there have been a few signs that Trump might be beginning to modify his position on the Paris Agreement. For instance, it is strange that there was no specific mention of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement in the Trump team’s public survey of what they would most like done in the first 100 days of the administration.²⁰ The only reference to climate change is in Question 11, ‘Cancel billions of dollars in payments to U.N. climate change programs, and use that money to fix our own country.’ At the meeting with journalists from the *New York Times*, mentioned in Section 3 above, Tom Friedman asked if Trump would withdraw from climate change accords,

and he replied, ‘I’m looking at it very closely. I have an open mind to it.’²¹ However, the administration he is assembling suggests that Trump may well decide to withdraw either from the Paris Agreement or from the whole UNFCCC process. If that happens what would be the likely consequences?

On the international scene if the United States pulls out of the Paris Agreement then it would be likely to cede influence to China on a wide range of topics.²² At the recent Marrakesh COP22 meeting the Chinese indicated that they would pursue efforts to decrease carbon emissions with or without the United States. China is already a world leader in renewable technology and the United States pulling out of the Agreement may greatly improve their advantage in this area. There have also been a number of suggestions that a carbon tax or tariff might be placed on the United States by countries unhappy with them pulling out of the Agreement.²³ This might provoke a damaging trade war. Internally, Trump may also have some difficulties as it is not impossible that individual States might decide to try to join the Paris Agreement if the United States pulled out.²⁴ For example, California, the world's sixth biggest economy, has enacted very tough climate change legislation of its own. Kevin De Leon, the California senate leader said joining the Paris Agreement was an 'option that I want to keep open'.²⁵ New York State would be among others that might well take up this option. Will Trump wish to give China such influence, want a major trade war, and risk California and other states going it alone?

5. Trump and Energy

Throughout the election campaign Trump had a number of key themes on energy production. He was far more positive about fossil fuels than his predecessor, Obama. Trump was particularly keen on expanding coal production. He was also wanting to increase production of fossil fuels from public lands. Trump has been a vocal advocate of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline which Obama stopped, and he may well wish to proceed with its construction. He said rather less about renewable energy, but his policy of favouring fossil fuels tends to place renewables in a less good light.

After the election we were given a further insight into Trump's energy policies when a memo was leaked from Thomas Pyle, who was heading the Department of Energy transition team.²⁶ The document listed 14 key policies, including opening up federal land for mining, scrapping the Clean Power Plan, building pipelines that had been stopped under Obama, and looking at the environmental impact of wind energy. However, some are suggesting that Trump's energy policies may not be that damaging, and that there could be some positive effects.²⁷ Let us now consider the key areas of a Trump administration energy policy, and the likely impacts. If there is one area that Trump was certain about in his election campaign it was his wish to end Obama's 'war on coal'. One of his campaign slogans was 'Trump digs coal'.²⁸ In recent years coal production has seen a big decline in the United States, and Trump's support for coal was an electoral advantage in some coal producing states. Since his election Trump has been less vocal in his backing for coal, possibly because he knows that revitalising the industry will be difficult if not impossible. In fact globally coal seems to be in trouble. In 2016 the International Energy Agency (IEA) suggested that global coal demand will rise by 214 million tonnes of oil equivalent (Mtoe) by 2040, compared with the 485Mtoe increase it predicted in 2015.²⁹ A key factor in this is that the IEA thinks that Chinese coal demand peaked in 2013, and is likely to decrease rapidly.

Even the latest global demand figures are too high if we are to keep global warming below 2°C (the target first agreed in Copenhagen in 2009 and reiterated in Paris in 2015), and increasing use of gas and renewables are pricing coal out of the market. Within the United States itself the switch towards cheaper gas and renewables started before the Obama administration, and seems to have had more to do with economics than pollution legislation.³⁰ Powerful forces, including Exxon Mobil who are major gas producers, will not wish to see a decrease in the expansion of gas to benefit coal. Trump narrowly won in Michigan, but its largest electricity provider, DTE Energy, is still phasing out coal. Their CEO Gerry Anderson said, ‘I don't know anybody in the country who would build another coal plant.’³¹ Michael Brune, the executive director of the Sierra Club agrees: ‘Coal is not coming back. If anyone hears otherwise from the president-elect or any leader in Congress or at the state level, those are empty promises whose intention is to distract voters and to distract citizens away from any attempt to confront reality.’³²

One of the key environmental battles of Obama’s presidency was over the building of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would have taken the products of tar sands in Alberta, Canada to Texas. There are many problems with such pipelines, but the main ones are possible leaks contaminating water bodies and aquifers, and the release of carbon dioxide from burning the oil, which would contribute considerably to climate change. It was for the latter reason that President Obama rejected Keystone XL on 6th November 2015. A massive campaign by organisations such as 350.org preceded the President’s decision. Trump has consistently said that he intends to revive the project, but this may not be that easy.³³ Apart from environmental considerations, Canada has found other ways to transport oil out of Alberta, and the low price of oil does not make building the pipeline economic at present. More recently, another project, the Dakota Access Pipeline, which is planned to take crude oil from Stanley in North Dakota to Patoka in Illinois was stopped on 4th December 2016, following a major campaign by Native Americans and environmental activists.³⁴ The pipeline was due to go under Lake Oahe near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, and the protestors feared that leaks would contaminate water supplies. An environmental impact statement has been requested, and alternative routes will be looked at. Not surprisingly, Trump has said that he will reverse this decision and allow work to continue. There is little doubt that any attempts to push pipeline projects such as Keystone XL and Dakota Access forward will meet fierce opposition both in the courts and on the ground as the environmentalists will not wish to lose their hard won victories.

On fracking, Trump has also been positive, and would like to open up public land to allow its wider development (see Section 6 below). He once said, ‘the shale energy revolution will unleash massive wealth for America, and we will end the war on coal and the war on miners.’³⁵ The big problem with this statement is that increased shale gas production has been one of the major reasons for the decline of coal. Realistically, Trump will not be able to promote both fracking and coal. In the current economic climate almost certainly fracking will win.

It is ironic that as a climate sceptic president is elected, who does not particularly like renewable energy, we are seeing incredible growth in solar and wind power generation both worldwide and in the United States. The IEA reported that globally renewable energy capacity had overtaken that of coal for the first time.³⁶ The United States installed 4,143 MW of solar power in the 3rd quarter of 2016, more than any other quarter in US history, and 191% greater than the same quarter of 2015.³⁷ In December 2016, Las Vegas became the largest city in the United States to use only green energy for its municipal facilities³⁸ The Sierra Club ‘Ready for 100’ campaign is working with cities across the United States on getting all of their electricity from renewable sources.³⁹ Several cities have published their plans as case studies.⁴⁰ Initiatives such as Connecticut’s Green Bank to help with investment in renewable energy may be able to offset some of the expected decrease in public funds coming from the Trump administration.⁴¹ Recent public opinion surveys in the United States have shown that Republicans remain far more sceptical about climate change than Democrats. However, both Republicans and Democrats are in favour of renewable energy.⁴² So major attacks on renewables might not be popular with Trump’s supporter base.

There have been several attempts to quantify the impacts of a Trump presidency on energy policy and then its effects on global emissions. In one of these, Chris Mooney suggests that the effects of Trump might not be that great, provided that other nations do not follow him, and that his impact does not last too long.⁴³ However, he rightly points out that keeping below the 2°C target was going to be very difficult even

without Trump, and that his election will make things harder. To conclude this section on a positive note, it does seem likely that on energy policies many directions are already set, and powerful economic trends are already happening, so that whatever the Trump administration does they may not have as much effect as some have feared. As Nordhaus and Loring have stated ‘Even should the next administration withdraw from the Paris Agreement and abandon the Clean Power Plan, the United States might outperform the commitments that the Obama administration made



Wind Turbines in Altamont Pass, California
Wind energy production has seen considerable growth in the United States in recent years

in Paris if it keeps the nation’s nuclear fleet online, continues tax incentives for deployment of wind and solar energy, and stays out of the way of the shale revolution.⁴⁴ If this is the case will it be worthwhile for the Trump administration to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, causing widespread international condemnation, when they would probably meet the Paris targets without trying?

6. Trump; Land, Water and Oceans

Of course most attention has focused on Trump's energy policies, and their likely effects on climate change. However, we should also be aware that a Trump administration will have impacts on other aspects of the environment, specifically, land, water and the oceans.



The Grand Canyon in Arizona

Public lands may be under threat from development for fossil fuel extraction under a Trump administration

In the last few weeks of his presidency, Obama tried to enact as much legislation as possible to protect the environment, including public lands.⁴⁵ Trump has said that he wishes to open up public lands for coal, oil and gas exploitation. These lands represent 27% of the total area of the United States and include areas that are important for biodiversity and forests that act as carbon stores.⁴⁶ It seems likely that Trump will try to sell off these public lands to individual states, but the legal process could take a long time. Even more controversially, Trump may want to privatise Native American reservations.⁴⁷ These only make up 2% of the United States, but are rich in fossil fuel reserves. Not all Native Americans oppose the development of their land, but many do, and protests similar to those at Standing Rock in 2016 (see Section 5) would be a likely response.

Trump once said that water may be the 'most important issue we face as a nation for the next generation,' and made it a 'top priority' for the next four years.⁴⁸ He is particularly keen to see

improved infrastructure for the transport of water. On the other hand Trump has stated that he would like to end the Waters of the United States rules which extended the federal government's clean-up powers to small water bodies.⁴⁹ These rules have been unpopular with farmers, but popular with environmentalists.

In December 2016, Obama tried to protect Arctic and Atlantic waters from gas and oil drilling.⁵⁰ In a joint announcement with Canada he used a 1953 law that may be difficult for Trump to reverse. At the moment the ban on Arctic drilling is largely theoretical as it is not economic. There are, however, some concerns that Trump may wish to roll back some of the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that were designated recently by Obama.⁵¹

7. The Businesses, the Cities and the States

One can gain the impression that Trump and his federal administration will be able to shape the internal environmental policy of the United States, but this may prove to be more complex than they imagine. In particular, the business sector, the cities and the individual states will all have a say in what the next four years look like.

For many years businesses in the United States have been pursuing environmentally friendly policies, and looking at ways to reduce their carbon emissions. Even the prospect of a Trump administration does not seem likely to deter them.⁵² In November 2016 nearly 400 businesses, including Monsanto, Staples, DuPont, Levi Strauss and General Mills, signed a letter calling for the United States to stay in the Paris Agreement and to continue with efforts to tackle climate change.⁵³ One problem for some of the big multinational companies is that they would have to comply with stricter environmental legislation imposed by other countries as a result of the Paris Agreement.

Michael Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York saw the cities of the United States as key movers in the battle against climate change, and is confident that whatever the federal administration does progress on cutting carbon emissions will continue: 'The reason is simple: cities, businesses and citizens



San Francisco, California

The city has some of the most progressive environmental policies in the United States

will continue to reduce emissions, and they will not let Washington stand in their way.⁵⁴ Following the election of Trump the government of San Francisco passed a resolution including ‘... climate change is not a hoax, or a plot by the Chinese. In this city, surrounded by water on three sides, science matters. And we will continue our work on CleanPower, Zero Waste, and everything else we are doing to protect future generations.’⁵⁵

Individual states have considerable power over environmental policy. As Justin Gillis pointed out, the Obama administration became frustrated with how little influence they could exert over the states to move them towards sustainability, and Trump will find exactly the same if he tries to go in the reverse direction.⁵⁶ Even Republican administrations may not all fall into line behind Trump. For example, John Kasich, Republican governor of Ohio, used his veto on 22nd December 2016 to uphold the state’s renewable and efficiency standards.⁵⁷ Likewise, Republican Texas has made huge strides in creating a clean energy economy, and the state has become a leader in both solar and wind energy.⁵⁸ We have already seen that California might attempt to join the Paris Agreement if the United States withdrew. There is also a small possibility that the state could go much further if they felt pushed into a corner by the Trump administration on environment and a whole range of other issues. The Yes California Independence Campaign⁵⁹(or Calexit) has been gathering supporters since the Trump victory, although it is theoretically impossible for a state to secede from the Union.

8. The Future of Science in the United States

The election of Donald Trump has sent shock waves through the scientific community in the United States, and there are many who are concerned for the future. Much scientific research, and particularly climate science, is publicly funded, and there have been many indications that this funding could be under threat. The Department of Energy, the Interior Department, the State Department, NASA, the Environmental Protection Agency and NOAA all have substantial funding for climate research, and cuts are almost inevitable.⁶⁰ Robert Walker, a former congressman who is Trump’s advisor on space policy, would like to see NASA concentrate on space science, and to cut what he has called the ‘politicized science’ surrounding climate change.⁶¹ In one of the most sinister developments Trump’s transition team in the Department of Energy asked the Department for a list of the names of all those who have worked on climate change. The Department refused to provide the list, but not surprisingly scientists were very concerned that this request was made.⁶²

Meanwhile in late 2016 scientists were copying climate data from United States government websites, fearing that the sites would be closed down or compromised once the Trump administration took charge.⁶³ If NASA does have its funding withdrawn for climate research, then it is possible that the satellites that it uses to collect the data will be closed down. Speaking to scientists at the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union in San Francisco on 14th December 2016, California Governor Jerry Brown had a surprising solution: ‘And, if Trump turns

off the satellites, California will launch its own damn satellite.’⁶⁴ California certainly has the technical capacity to do this, but whether they would really make such a move is an open question.

9. Trump’s Team

As I write in January 2017 the Trump administration has not taken power, and so much of what I have said so far is based on informed guesswork. The team that Trump has assembled for his administration since the election may be the strongest indicator of the way he might attempt to shape the environmental policy of the United States in the next four years. It is now clear that the majority of Trump’s incoming team are climate sceptics, and many have links to the fossil fuel industry. Coming from different angles, Coral Davenport⁶⁵ and Ben Kahn⁶⁶ have both provided analyses of the positions on climate change taken by Trump’s nominees. Here we will concentrate on three key people.

Scott Pruitt, the current attorney general of Oklahoma, has been nominated to be the next Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He is a climate sceptic and has been a leader in the legal battle to defeat the Clean Power Plan.⁶⁷ His election campaigns have been funded by the fossil fuel industry. Many environmentalists fear that he will attempt a roll back of many of Obama’s climate change policies, but as we have seen this may not be an easy task.

Rick Perry is a former Governor of Texas, and ran for the Republican presidential nomination twice. He has been nominated to be Secretary for Energy. Perry has long been a climate sceptic, and at one time advocated closing the Department he has been nominated to run. His political campaigns have been heavily funded by the fossil fuel industry. As Governor of Texas he saw a major expansion in both oil and gas production.⁶⁸ However, wind power also surged under his governorship, and he once said, 'You can be proud that Texas produces more energy from wind turbines than all but five countries'. Since he stepped down as governor in January 2015 there has also been an expansion of solar energy production in Texas as the technology became cheaper. It appears that although Perry is a climate sceptic he is an energy pragmatist who is in favour of diversifying energy production sources.

Rex Tillerson is currently the Chief Executive of Exxon Mobil, and has been nominated to be the next Secretary of State. During his time as Chief Executive the company has changed its public position on climate change, and having been firmly climate sceptic they now acknowledge that it is a problem and they endorsed the Paris Agreement.⁶⁹ This has led some environmentalists to cautiously welcome Tillerson’s nomination. Others are less happy, wondering how genuine the change in Exxon Mobil’s policy has been. If the nomination is approved Tillerson will have a major role in shaping the United States approach to the Paris Agreement.

All of the nominations for Trump's cabinet (except the White House Chief of Staff) have to be approved by Senate, and cannot be officially confirmed until after the inauguration on 20th January 2017. As the Republicans have a majority in the Senate it is expected that most of the nominations will be confirmed, although the Democrats could hold up the process if they wish.⁷⁰ Some may be controversial even for the Republicans. For instance Tillerson's relationship with Putin and Russia may well come under intense scrutiny. It would not be surprising if a few of the nominees eventually withdrew or were even rejected by Senate, in which case Trump would have to come up with replacements.

10. The Church Response

We will now consider how the Church has responded to Trump's victory in November 2016. First it is necessary to give some background information, particularly concerning the Church in the United States.

In an opinion survey of the United States carried out in 2014 strong majorities in every religious group believed the earth was getting warmer, but only 28% of white evangelicals thought the change is due to human activity. That compares with 41% of white mainline Protestants and 45% of Catholics.⁷¹ These figures are out of line with the whole US population where 50% accept human induced climate change. Of those with no religious affiliation 64% agreed that humans were causing climate change.

During the presidential campaign religion, like climate change, was rarely mentioned, but Laurie Goodstein believes it was an important factor in Trump's victory.⁷² Even though Trump has been married three times and was accused of inappropriate behaviour with women on many occasions, the Christian right were highly influential in his election win. They feared that a Hillary Clinton government would be pro-abortion and pro-gay, and went for Trump despite his moral inadequacies, and the fact that he rarely goes to church. White evangelicals make up 26% of the American electorate, and 81% of them voted for Trump.⁷³ Only 16% voted for Clinton. Catholics, who make up 23% of the electorate gave their support to Trump over Clinton by 52% to 45%. Although the vast majority of white evangelicals voted for Trump, there were deep divisions within their leadership. Russell Moore (president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention), Al Mohler (president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) and Beth Moore (Living Proof Ministries) were against Trump.⁷⁴ Almost without exception the leaders of the evangelical environmental ministries in the United States were against Trump (my personal observation). However, powerful evangelical figures such as Jerry Falwell Jr., Ralph Reed and Franklin Graham came out in favour of Trump. Russell Moore said after the election that he would 'give the new president the benefit of the doubt', but he has come under strong pressure from other evangelicals, and some would like him removed from his present position.⁷⁵

How have Christian environmentalists responded to Trump's election both in the United States and globally? Mitchell C. Hescoc, president of the Evangelical Environmental Network⁷⁶ in the States, said some of his colleagues were 'down in the dumps' at a post-Election Day retreat.⁷⁷ But Hescoc also tried to strike a positive note: 'Our job is to put more boots on the ground, get people activated and work with Mr. Trump, the Congress and all America to come up with sustainable climate solutions that will grow the economy, create jobs and protect our children's health.'

Following the nomination of Scott Pruitt to head the EPA (see Section 9 above), Catholic and Evangelical leaders in the United States wrote an open letter to Trump.⁷⁸ In that letter the leaders requested that Pruitt's name be withdrawn, and that another candidate be chosen in his place. Katharine Hayhoe, the evangelical climate scientist, wrote an impassioned open letter to president-elect Trump, trying to persuade him of the truth of climate change.⁷⁹ John Elwood's posts on the *Beloved Planet* website give very detailed accounts of creation care issues in the United States from an evangelical perspective.⁸⁰ Of recent interest were his outstanding reports on the Standing Rock protests (see Section 5), and his story of a ship in trouble based on a sermon illustration from Ed Brown, 'Why I am devastated by the election.'⁸¹ I hope John will be able to keep up the good work. Perhaps the best biblical reflection on Trump's election and what it means for creation care came from Ed Brown of the Lausanne/WEA Creation Care Network.⁸² Ed's thinking was based on Isaiah 6, and his post is well worth reading. He concludes that we should not be diverted by Trump or whether the Church backs us, 'We are called to proclaim this truth: God loves his creation, and he has given us the task of taking care of it.' Christian environmentalists in the United States, and most particularly the evangelicals within the movement, are likely to come under heavy pressure in the next four years and they will need our prayers.

At a global church level it is Pope Francis who has made the most forceful statement on the environmental implications of Trump's presidency, and he was particularly concerned to see a rapid implementation of the Paris Agreement. Speaking to a group of scientists, including Stephen Hawking, on 28th November 2016 he said, 'The 'distraction' or delay in implementing global agreements on the environment shows that politics has become submissive to a technology and economy which seek profit above all else.'⁸³ The Pope did not mention Trump by name, but it was clear who his speech was aimed at.

Finally, Andy Atkins, Chief Executive Officer of A Rocha UK, gave a UK perspective saying, 'If Trump implements even half of his campaign promises, it'll be a disaster for the environment.'⁸⁴ He then went on to call the citizens of the UK to make a renewed commitment to environmental sustainability and the care of God's creation, ending with a rallying cry, 'That's our job. Donald Trump's election just made that even more important. With prayer, mutual support and renewed determination, let's get on with it!' Coming from a totally different starting point, Andy Atkins arrives at an almost identical conclusion to Ed Brown.

11. Conclusion

In the two months since Donald Trump's election opinions have varied concerning his likely effects on the environment. As we noted in the Introduction some articles, particularly the early ones, were doom laden. Then there was a re-appraisal of the situation with many commentators wondering how much effect Trump will really have. Just before I finished this briefing I came across the latest of these positive articles from British energy expert, Dr Jeremy Leggett. Entitled, 'Never mind Trump, the global clean energy transition is racing forward', Leggett thinks the global energy transition is 'probably irreversible'.⁸⁵ I have almost certainly been more influenced by those painting a positive view of the future, but have I been too measured in my approach and too optimistic? If you want an antidote to my optimism then Brad Plumer's article in *Vox* would be a good start.⁸⁶ Plumer thinks the individual states are not decarbonising rapidly enough, that federal policy is important in cutting carbon emissions, and that the Trump presidency might end any hope for remaining under the 2°C global target. Only time will tell whether the pessimists or the optimists are correct.

A number of key questions arise from the analysis above that will only be answered over the next four years:

1. Will Donald Trump follow a climate sceptic path, or will this be moderated in office?
2. Will the United States pull out of the Paris Agreement?
3. Will Trump be able to reverse the decline in coal?
4. Will work begin again on the Keystone XL pipeline?
5. Will Trump's administration dent the surge in the use of renewable energy sources?
6. Will Trump succeed in selling off public lands?
7. Will the cities and the states be able to prevent the worst effects of a roll back in environmental legislation?
8. How far will California go to protect environmental sustainability?
9. Will climate science in the United States survive four years under Trump?
10. Will the Church in the United States and beyond rise to the new challenges set before them?

Of course there are many more questions I could have chosen, but these ten should provide a reasonable checklist. I might return to them at intervals in the next four years- watch this space!

What Trump has said he will do, what he would actually like to do, and what he will be able to do in practice are all rather different things. It is clear that he will not be good news for the environment, but it is far from clear how bad he will be. Certainly at this point in history I would have preferred an American president who was more positive about environmental concerns. Perhaps the most worrying aspect of Donald Trump's presidency with regard to the environment has not been much mentioned in the press. It seems likely that his administration will pursue a more aggressive, and maybe even chaotic, foreign policy. If this were to lead to greater conflict then a significant side effect would be damage to the environment. If any such conflict were to involve nuclear weapons then the damage to the environment would be enormous. Having conducted my analysis it is this issue that most concerns me.

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I would like to thank John Weaver for his advice. All photos are from my own collection except Donald Trump. Image ID: 353116925 Credit: Joseph Sohm / Shutterstock.com

Pinterest

I found Pinterest particularly useful for researching this briefing, and for storing the articles consulted. The "Trump and Environment" collection is likely to continue growing after the publication of this briefing and can be found here: <https://uk.pinterest.com/martinjhodson/trump-and-environment/>

Biography

Dr Martin J. Hodson is Operations Director for The John Ray Initiative (JRI). He is a plant scientist and environmental biologist who speaks and writes widely on environmental issues. Martin teaches at both universities in Oxford, and has over 100 publications, mostly in international scientific journals. His recent publications include: *Functional Biology of Plants* (2012, with John Bryant); *The Ethics of Climatic Scepticism* (2015, with Margot Hodson); and *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues* (2015, with Margot Hodson).



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THE JOHN RAY INITIATIVE

The *John Ray Initiative* promotes responsible environment stewardship in accordance with Christian principles and the wise use of science and technology. JRI organises seminars and disseminates information on environmental stewardship.

Inspiration for JRI is taken from John Ray (1627-1705), English naturalist, Christian theologian and first biological systematist of modern times, preceding Carl Linnaeus.

For more information contact: The John Ray Initiative (JRI) via email: admin@jri.org.uk

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