

Bridging the Divide:  
Why Landscape Architects Should Start Preaching to the Choir

by

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## ABSTRACT

While Lynn White's 1967 article, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*, ignited a firestorm of controversy regarding the relationship between religion, particularly Christianity, and the environment, the testing of White's hypothesis, that Christians are anthropocentric and anti-environment, has produced results that are significantly less clear. Additionally, little research has been conducted with experts in the field of Christianity, the clergy, adding to already significant gaps in the literature. The current research study helps fill that gap by providing the perspective of clergy on the relationship between Christianity and the environment. This qualitative study uses in-depth interviews to assess the topics of importance to members of the clergy within the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan region as well as their professional perspective of the relationship between religion and the environment. The results indicate that community is of great importance to leaders of faith-based organizations, but stewardship is also a primary foundation of the church. While no support was found for White's hypothesis, a willingness to learn and a need for expertise on environmental issues was identified. In this regard, environmental professionals, specifically landscape architects, have been identified as the ideal group to provide the bridge between faith-based organizations and the environment.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1967, historian Lynn White published an article entitled "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" which accused the Judeo-Christian belief system as the origin of the ecological crisis facing the earth. The core argument White made was that the Judeo-Christian perspective of the world is one in which humans are dominant over nature and Christianity, and primarily Western Christianity, is inherently anthropocentric and anti-environment. Since then, Christianity has frequently been "... characterized... as at odds with environmentalism and ecological values" (Clements et al., 2013, p. 1). Environmental groups are therefore wary of religious involvement and religious groups are (or at least are perceived to be) wary of environmental groups (Feldman & Moseley, 2003).

Recently however, there has been a growing call for religious participation in environmentalism, especially regarding climate change (National Religious Partnership for the Environment, 1990, Oxford Declaration on Global Warming, 2002 and Wallis, 2014). The problems surrounding climate change are increasingly being seen as not just issues of science, but of values, morals and ethics, making religion a prime option for participation. Religious leaders themselves are also joining in the call for action, as can be exemplified by the recent statements from Pope Francis that "... one of the greatest challenges of our time: [is] to convert ourselves to a type of development that knows how to respect creation," and, going even further in stating that "... this is our sin, exploiting the Earth and not allowing her to her give us what she has within her," (Pullella, 2014).

While it is frequently overlooked in the literature, despite White's theory blaming Christianity for the environmental crisis, White also acknowledged that, "... the remedy must also be essentially religious" (White, 1967, p. 1207). In order to

make progress towards this remedy it is essential to first establish what the religious perspectives are, what they believe their role to be in the realm of environmentalism, what actions (if any) they are pursuing and what their contributions may be for communities. While some research has attempted to establish what the environmental perspectives of religious groups are in broad terms, little has been done to explore the perspectives of religious groups regarding the environment, especially from the point of view of clergy. Considering the calls for religious involvement in environmental activities, it is necessary to first establish a baseline of religious perspectives on environmentalism.

As influential leaders and representatives of their respective faiths, clergy are the most logical starting point. Furthermore, religious leaders are in a unique position to potentially influence both the public and government leaders. Not only are they the experts in their field, they also are perceived by many to be pillars of the community where they live and work. Considering the position of significance they hold, and as potential agents of change, the perspectives of religious leaders regarding environmental issues and what they believe their official role(s) to be, is of vital importance. Currently this knowledge is unavailable, and a greater understanding of motivating factors is needed. This research attempts to fill part of that role.

In the last 50 years, the environmental movement has attempted to motivate people through science, regulations, and money, with limited success. It is possible however, that a moral/ethical argument may be better suited for this motivation. Increased attention has occurred emphasizing the moral nature of climate change mitigation in addition to the scientific nature (National Religious Partnership for the Environment, 1990, Oxford Declaration on Global Warming, 2002 and Wallis, 2014).

It is possible that religious perspectives may provide a better understanding of the potential for such motivation.

Considering all of this, it is apparent that more attention must be paid to understanding the perspectives of religious adherents regarding the environment. As such, the intention of this research is to explore what the environmental perspectives are of religious groups within the Phoenix metropolitan area, and what they believe are their roles and responsibilities. Additionally, this research seeks to determine what actions/activities religious groups are taking regarding environmentalism (if any) and how they interact with the community in this arena. It should be noted though that it is the intention of this research to explore and catalogue the variability of perspectives across the differing religious denominations within the Phoenix area, not to provide a comparison of perspectives among the religious traditions. It is first necessary to understand what the different perspectives are within the region, before attempting to compare or contrast various groups. The current research study uses a qualitative methodology to assess religious groups (specifically Christians) in the Phoenix metropolitan area in order to explore the various perspectives regarding the environment. Additionally, the role landscape architects, as well as other environmental professionals, can take to help facilitate the collaboration of religious and environmental organizations is discussed.

Beginning with an overview of the literature, this discussion will outline the argument for including religious groups and organizations in environmental activities, as well as present the current perspectives of religious adherents (based on the literature to date), from both a philosophical and empirical point of view. From there, a discussion of the research methods is provided included a detailed account of the sample strategy and analysis. An overview of the findings, including details on the codes and themes developed, is then presented. Finally, a discussion of the

significance of the research findings is presented, including outlining steps for increasing the participation of faith-based organizations in environmental initiatives and activities, with a particular focus on the role landscape architects can play in that undertaking. Additionally, future research directions are identified. While the past research may have been unable to conclusively and accurately determine the perspectives of religious groups regarding the environment, the conclusion White made, that the solution to the environmental crisis will need to be religious, is quite correct. Progress on environmental activities and initiatives is not possible without the involvement and collaboration of many different groups of people. This research study helps to identify ways in which that collaboration may be achievable.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

In 1967, historian Lynn White published an oft-cited article, "The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", accusing the Judeo-Christian belief system as the origin of the ecological crisis facing the earth (White, 1967). The core argument White made was that the Judeo-Christian perspective of the world is one in which humans are dominant over nature and (primarily Western) Christianity in particular is inherently anthropocentric and anti-environment. While this was not necessarily an entirely new concept (both environmentalist Aldo Leopold and landscape architect Ian McHarg had previously insinuated the negative role of religion towards the environment), White's essay ignited a firestorm of controversy, especially by religious scholars and social scientists eager to prove (or refute) such claims. Considerable research has been done since the original publication of White's essay, but in order to fully understand the current status, it is necessary to first start at the beginning and examine White's hypothesis and the role of religion in the environment in a broader context.

Additionally, while the White article initially opened the door for study into the relationship between religion and the environment, in recent years there has been a growing call for seeing environmental issues as moral and ethical concerns. This further paved the way for bringing faith-based organizations into the discussion. The Pope released his environmental encyclical "Laudato Si" in 2015 to much fanfare, both within the Catholic Church and outside as it was seen as clear evidence that the environment was a significant concern for the faith. While receiving significantly less attention, many other Christian denominations have also released documents stating

their stance on the environment and the need to care for creation<sup>1</sup>. It is not just faith-based organizations moving towards a greater involvement in the environmental movement however.

In the last 50 years, the environmental movement has attempted to motivate people through science, regulations and money, with limited success. Much like the religious organizations, scientific and environmental groups are beginning to consider if a moral/ethical argument may be better suited for the necessary motivation towards action. Increased attention has occurred emphasizing the moral nature of climate change mitigation in addition to the scientific nature (National Religious Partnership for the Environment, 1990, Oxford Declaration on Global Warming, 2002 and Wallis, 2014). It is possible that religious perspectives may provide a better understanding of the potential for such motivation.

The following review of literature provides the background support for the current research study including the significance of the Phoenix metro region as the primary study area and the background on religion and the environment.

### **Phoenix Issues and Context**

The Phoenix metropolitan area is an ideal location for this study for several reasons. As acknowledged by the subtitle of the 2011 Andrew Ross book *Bird on Fire: Lessons from the World's Least Sustainable City*, Phoenix is frequently on lists of unsustainable cities. The already oppressive climate with harsh temperatures and little rainfall place Phoenix "... squarely in the crosshairs of climate change" as phrased by deBuys in his 2013 op-ed, "Could Phoenix Soon Become Uninhabitable?". The picture painted by Ross (2011) and deBuys (2013) is bleak for Phoenix:

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<sup>1</sup> While not directly summarized in this literature review, these documents were reviewed as part of the data analysis and verification.

excessive water use (especially for use in the landscape), sprawling development, an unstable economy built on this sprawl and an urban heat island of epic proportions.

Further, given Phoenix has a long history of adding greenery into the landscape to create an "... oasis in the desert," (Martin et al., 2003, p. 9), considerable research has found that the majority of residential water use is for landscaping (~60% of residential use is outdoors) and that despite a shift towards more drought-friendly landscape choices, 70% of homeowners still prefer "at least some lawn area" (Yabiku et al., 2007, p. 2). Furthermore, the preference for mesic landscaping actually increases over time, as long-term residents of Phoenix have been found to prefer green lawns over the xeric landscaping typically preferred by newcomers to the region (Larson et al., 2009; Martin et al. 2003; Yabiku et al. 2008). Even with common knowledge of the limited water within the region as a whole, Phoenix residents are still drawn to water intensive landscape choices, a possibly significant concern given the water situation within the Phoenix area.

Water is especially sensitive for the Phoenix metropolitan area. While the city is located in the valley formed by several watersheds, each of the rivers is dry, most notably the Salt River which is dammed upstream to provide hydroelectric power for the city. Much of the Phoenix area's water supply comes from the Colorado River, where it is pumped, uphill, for several hundred miles via the Central Arizona Project (CAP) Canal (CAP, 2013 and azcentral.com, no date). While many consider this to be "borrowed" water that the city and its residents should not depend on for the future, others insist the water supply is more than sufficient and no reasons exist for concern.

The Central Arizona Project goes as far to state that "... the Colorado River system will never "dry up" and a 2013 report from the Morrison Institute states that "even if climate change decreases that supply by 25 percent or more, the storage

systems serving the Sun Corridor hold several years' worth of water and are designed to smooth out a highly variable supply," (Gammage, et al., 2013, p. 6). At the same time however, water levels in Lake Mead (the largest reservoir of Colorado River water) are at the lowest levels since the completion of the project in the 1930s and it was acknowledged in 2014 that if the situation did not improve, reductions in water delivery would begin as soon as January 2016 with water rationing in Arizona starting the following year (Conner, 2014 and Ritter, 2014). Unfortunately, while the rationing of water was able to be postponed for several years, effective January 2020, water restrictions will go into effect in Arizona, Nevada, and Mexico as the water levels at Lake Mead are at a mere 39 percent and Bureau of Reclamations projections show as of January 1, 2020 levels will be below the level to trigger cuts (James, 2019).

Problematically, agencies within Arizona responsible for water do not agree on strategies for addressing any forthcoming shortages. Michael J. Lacey, director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources has stated that "... we can certainly hope for better conditions than we've experienced in recent times, but we have to actively and continue to plan for the worst case," while Kathryn Sorensen, the Water Services Department director for the City of Phoenix has said "... the solution can't come just from municipal conservation; there isn't enough water there," in response to the concept of Phoenix restricting water use for outdoor uses like lawns and swimming pools (Ritter, 2014). Despite assurances provided that the water supply in Phoenix will be sufficient for many years no matter the environmental or population situation, it seems risky to place faith in a water supply shared by multiple states, all of which are facing their own water shortages (California, Nevada and Colorado share the Colorado River water).



This shortage is especially significant because the CAP agreed to secondary water rights in order to secure loans for the construction of the CAP Canal, meaning "... the CAP Canal will bear the full brunt from any long-term shortage in the lower basin of the Colorado River before California's supplies will be curtailed" (Gober et al., 2009, p. 201). Combine the water supply issues, arid climate and the expanding urban heat island, and the Phoenix metropolitan area is clearly at the forefront of environmental issues if not outright crisis. Given the dire state of environmental affairs in the area, Phoenix is a good proving ground for assessing the potential role religious groups may play in addressing these issues.

Lastly, Maricopa County, where Phoenix is located, and the Phoenix metro area are booming in population. For 2016, 2017, and 2018, Maricopa County was the fastest growing county in the United States with a 2018 total of 4,410,82 residents (Boehm, 2019). The city of Phoenix is also the fastest growing city in the United States as well, with an increase in population of 25,288 between 2017 and 2018 (Gallen, 2019). Combine this with the fact that Arizona is the fourth fastest growing state in the United States, and it is clear that Arizona, and specifically the Phoenix metro area, are at the forefront of impacts to people regarding the environment. The ever-increasing population will certainly have an impact on the environment, but the environment will also certainly impact many people.

### **Religion and Environment**

As previously mentioned, the core argument White made was that the Christian perspective of the world is one in which humans are dominant over nature and (primarily Western) Christianity in particular is inherently anthropocentric and anti-environment. Therefore, using this train of thought, White concluded that Christianity is responsible for the ecological crisis. Essentially, since Man named all of the animals God created, this established human dominance over the world and

solidified the notion that "God planned [everything] explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes" (White, 1967, p. 1206). What White was positing was the concept of not only a separation between humans and the rest of the natural world, but a hierarchy of control within the environment, with humans sitting squarely at the top with complete power.

Two primary pieces of evidence were provided by White to support his conclusion. The first was the indirect reference to Genesis 1:28 which states "God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground," (New International Version). White never explicitly referenced this passage, but in his discussion of the Creation story, he was clearly referencing it as support for his hypothesis. Related to this reasoning, White also provided historical support in regard to past saints and theologians who presented theories indicating a division between humans and nature or promotion of anthropocentric ideals-Tertullian, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons and the destruction of pagan animism are each specifically referenced. The Christian destruction of animism provides the strongest support for White's hypothesis. Animism suggested that all living things (trees, rivers, hills, etc.) had their own guardian spirit which must be placated before using said object (White, 1967). When Christians were successful in eradicating this notion, the transition of using (and exploiting) nature at will became much easier. White does also acknowledge that animism was theoretically replaced by the practice of establishing patron saints, but the dynamics were entirely different and therefore do not serve as a valid substitute (White, 1967).

The second piece of supporting evidence White provided for his hypothesis was science and technology, or more specifically, the Christian and religious roots of

science and technology. A significant amount of time is spent tracing the historical roots of science and its Western origins, before White acknowledges that despite other's valid attempts over time, Western science and technology is the basis for the world's science and technology (White, 1967). As he bluntly states, "One thing is so certain that it seems stupid to verbalize it: both modern technology and modern science are distinctively Occidental" (White, 1967, p. 1204). He then goes on to trace the medieval origins of science and technology including along the way how religion, specifically Christianity, influenced science. He indicated that until the late 18th Century, most "scientists" not only described their work in religious terms, but actually could be considered more as theologians, doing their research to better understand God (White, 1967). Galileo and Newton are both specifically referenced as falling into this category.

It is with this piece of evidence that White links together his argument in two pieces. Essentially, first, the merger between science and technology that lead to the Industrial Revolution (and consequently, ecological destruction) essentially began as a Christian undertaking to better understand God, and second, since the Creation story in Genesis 1 tells Christians to subdue the earth and have dominion over it, humans are separate from and above nature, and can use it however they see fit, so therefore, Christians are entirely anthropocentric and also responsible for the ecologic crisis. While White was confident in his conclusions, not everyone has agreed with him and a significant body of research exists attempting to refute such claims.

**Types of Research.** Much of the past research on religion and the environment can be divided into one of two categories: a philosophical basis for understanding the relationship between various religions and the environment (typically conducted by either religious scholars or philosophers/ethicists) and

research that is empirical in nature and frequently conducted by social scientists attempting to either prove or refute some variation of the hypothesis posited by White in 1967. A third type of research within the area that is slowly emerging is a focus on place-based research grounded in the activities of churches in response to localized environmental issues or concerns. However, as this research is extremely place-dependent and none was identified for the study area, it is not covered within this study. Also important to acknowledge is that the planning and landscape architecture fields have taken little notice of the activities of religious groups or how such groups may benefit the design and planning process in urban areas. This perspective is a significant gap within the literature to date. The following discussion further elaborates the two primary categories of literature currently available regarding religion and the environment, philosophical and empirical.

***Philosophical.*** Many, religious traditions have their own perspective on what the relationship should be between humans and the natural environment. Some traditions (Judaism and Christianity in particular) share a common history and origin, but have slightly different interpretations on their responsibilities. Considerable effort has been taken by researchers in the past to catalogue the various perspectives of the religions of the world and to attempt to summarize even only the most widespread of traditions would be outside the scope of the current research. Additionally, given that this research study focuses on the Phoenix metropolitan area, which is predominately Christian, the following discussion will center on the Christian perspective.

The Christian perspective of the relationship between humans and the environment primarily stems from the Old Testament of the Bible, specifically the book of Genesis. Two sections in particular have significantly impacted the Christian perspective as well as arguments for and against environmentalism, Genesis 1:26-28

and Genesis 2:15. As an argument for Christian dominion and control over the environment, reference is typically made to Genesis 1:26-28 which states:

*<sup>26</sup> "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (New International Version)*

This is the section mentioned by White and others as justification for the conclusion of Christianity being anthropocentric. One chapter later however, is the verse cited as support for the concept that Christians are to be stewards of the environment and protect it as seen in Genesis 2:15:

*<sup>15</sup> "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." (New International Version)*

This verse is most typically provided as justification for the theory that while humans were provided the right to use the land, they were also assigned responsibility to take care of it at the same time. While this ambiguity has been used to support various positions on the topic, several basic points can still be identified, that otherwise form the basis for the Christian perspective.

- The Earth belongs to God, not humans. Since God created everything, the world belongs to God, not humans (Provan, 2012). Similarly, since God created everything, and saw that it was "good," everything has a purpose unto itself, irrespective of humans. This is also noted in Psalm 104 and Job 34 and 38. Furthermore, as can be noted in both Creation stories in Genesis, humans do not have their own day of creation, but share it "with

the other land creatures” thus placing humans squarely as *part of* the creation, not *above it* (Provan, 2012, p. 35).

- Naming creatures does not equate to dominance over them. In his essay, White references man’s naming of the creatures of the Earth as evidence for his dominion over it (White, 1967). As Provan notes however, “... it cannot be established from Genesis 2, however, that the naming of the animals has anything to do with establishing dominance over them. Although the naming of someone in the Old Testament is in fact often done by a person who has authority over another (e.g. a parent), it should be obvious that we cannot deduce from this fact that there is an intrinsic link between naming and asserting authority” (2012, p. 35).
- Humans were intended to govern, not subdue, the Earth. The original text of Genesis 1:26-28 used the word *radah* for ruling the earth, which has been interpreted as ‘subdue’ in many translations and is more in line with the Hebrew word *kabash*, which has a militaristic or aggressive view. *Radah*, the original word, means something more along the lines of “to rule” as in a governing sense (McDaniel, 1994 and Provan, 2012). In this sense then, not only has there been possibly a gross mistranslation of the original text, but the original meaning intended was for humans to govern over the world, which, in context also meant to ensure the welfare of, in the way a king is responsible to his subjects (Provan, 2012).
- Being created in God’s image is a responsibility requiring stewardship of the Earth. While man was created in God’s image, this does not mean humanity is in any way equal to God or above other creatures (Cain and Martin, 2009). Instead, this is typically taken to mean that being made in God’s image bestows upon humans a responsibility, not a privilege, and

must be considered as such (Gottlieb, 2006). In light of this, the notion of stewardship comes into play as the method humans should be using for guidance in their relationship to the earth.

While individual verses of the Bible may be taken out of context and used as justification for humans using the environment for their own purposes, this is not necessarily a widespread or even accurate understanding of the Christian viewpoint on the relationship between humans and the environment. Likewise, it is difficult to justify that humans were actually intended to have dominion over the Earth, as White posited and some Biblical translations indicated. When taken in their original form and in context, humans are clearly a part of God's creation, bestowed with a responsibility, not dominion. The existing research from religious scholars and philosophers identify a clear responsibility given to humanity to take care of the Earth and all of its inhabitants, not just the humans. This issue of dominion is one frequently included in empirical studies regarding religion and the environment. While the religious scholars may have concluded that humans have responsibility, not dominion, over the Earth, the results of empirical studies are much less clear.

***Empirical.*** In the approximately 50 years since the publication of the White article in 1967, interest has been growing in the study of religion and the environment. In addition to religious scholars, social scientists have been eager to weigh in on the subject and numerous attempts have been made to empirically assess whether or not Christians are genuinely anti-environmental or not. As of February 2019, a total of twenty-two studies had been identified on this topic. While many of the studies had unique elements to them, most followed a similar method to determine how religion impacted environmentalism: the use of surveys. Each also in some way attempted to either prove or refute the White hypothesis. Despite using

similar methods, and in some cases even the same dataset, the results of these studies were mixed.

Out of the twenty-two studies, six found what they believed to be conclusive support for the White hypothesis, that Christians possess an anti-environmental perspective: Eckburg and Blocker (1989), Schultz, Zelezny & Dalrymple (2000), Clements, McCright & Xiao (2013), Clements, McCright, & Xiao (2014), Konisky (2017) and Carlisle and Clark (2018). Eckburg and Blocker (1989) indicated that belief in the Bible "... predicted stances on each of a variety of environmental concern indexes (p. 516), while in 2013 Clements et al., "... found that self-identified Christians report lower levels of environmental concern than do non-Christians and nonreligious respondents" (p. 13). Clements et al., (2014), provided additional support to their previous conclusion and added an additional set of data to the previous analysis by including 2010 General Social Survey data (frequently utilized throughout the religion and environment empirical research). While the Konisky (2017) study attempted to determine if there had been a "greening" of Christianity in recent years and concluded there had not been such a change, it did also note that ethnographic study of the subject was necessary and may lead to more comprehensive findings. Finally, Carlisle and Clark (2018) found no support for the "greening" of Christianity concept in their analysis yet acknowledged that making such a conclusion based on environmental spending was likely not the most appropriate method. The more recent research findings, while still indicating Christians possess an anti-environmental perspective are particularly beneficial in that they acknowledge that additional research, but of a different methodology, is needed to better understand the issue of religion and the environment, which is in sharp contrast to the conclusions of researchers in years past. This is likely an indication of the growing awareness of qualitative research, both regarding this topic



specifically, but also more broadly. Overall however, past research does provide support for the claim that Christians are inherently anti-environmental is available, but it is certainly lacking and not enough to unequivocally make such an assessment. The evidence to refute this claim is also somewhat insufficient however.

A total of four studies were identified which provided support (in the eyes of the researchers) to refute the White hypothesis, all conducted in the 1990s. Greeley's 1993 study intended to test the findings of Eckburg and Blocker's 1989 study and the findings indicated Non-Christians, Catholics and Liberals were more likely to support environmental spending and that "... those who believe in God and the Bible, and Christians who reject the various levels of rigidity are as likely as anyone else to support environmental spending" (Greeley, 1993, p. 27-28). A study by Boyd found that "... Christian religious beliefs and behaviors are not strongly linked to either support for the environment or lack of support for the environment," (1999, p. 42). In contrast, Wolkomir, Futreal, Woodrum and Hoban (1997a) found religious fundamentalism is a factor in predicting fewer environmental behaviors, but would not use this to claim support for Christians being inherently anti-environmental per White's hypothesis. In one of the most direct acknowledgements to the White hypothesis, in 1994 Woodrum and Hoban stated that "... on the institutional level this study finds no empirical basis for singling out churches as culpable for environmental problems" (1994, p. 193). The evidence to refute White is as strong as that which supports it. This conclusion gets considerable support from the fact that the bulk of the empirical research has found mixed results regarding the White hypothesis.

By far, much of the research to date has had mixed results with a total of twelve studies finding both support for and against aspects of the White hypothesis. The results of this significant body of research range from the subtle with "... Non-

Judeo-Christians slightly more likely to evidence greater concern for environmental issues than Judeo-Christians" (Hand and Van Liere, 1984, p. 567) and "... while responses of Catholics and Protestants are significantly different from those of non-Judeo-Christians in the religious diversity models, the differences, in all cases, are a matter of degree. It is not as though Catholics and Protestants hold views in opposition to those of non-Judeo-Christians," (Shaiko, 1987, p. 257) to more clear cut "... among clergy, evangelicals are least environmental; mainline Protestants and Catholics are much "greener," (Guth, Green, Kellstedt and Smidt, 1995, p. 373) and "...evidence suggests that evangelicalism is the least tractable of the Christian traditions for environmental theologies" (Guth et al., 1995, p. 377).

A more recent study by Sherkat and Ellison found that "Conservative Protestants and Biblical inerrantists are significantly less apt to report political or private environmental behaviors, and the religious conservatives are significantly less willing than other respondents to make personal sacrifices for nature," (2007, p. 77) but also that "... importantly, conservative Protestants and biblical inerrantists are significantly distinctive on two religious factors that may influence environmental orientations and behaviors: (1) they tend to hold stronger "stewardship" beliefs, and, (2) they attend church significantly more often than other respondents" (2007, p. 78) indicating that while more conservative belief systems may encourage less pro-environmental behaviors, they may also have greater belief in the concept of stewardship which can in fact positively influence behavior. Additionally, Schultz et al. (2000) determined that "...religious importance was positively correlated with anthropocentrism and negatively correlated with NEP [New Environmental Paradigm], but it was unrelated to ecocentrism or to pro-environmental behavior" (p. 588) and that "... it is not the case that people with a literal belief in the Bible are unconcerned about environmental degradation but instead that their concerns are

rooted in the effects that this degradation will have for humans" (p. 588). This was the only case suggesting that people can be both anthropocentric and not anti-environment. A more recent study by Kilburn (2014) noted that a literal view of the Bible resulted in less concern for the consequences of climate change, but also that evangelical Protestants who attended church more regularly were more concerned about the impacts of climate change. Lastly, a 2015 study by Arbuckle and Konisky found that "...while the results generally support traditional arguments that religion depresses concern about the environment, they also reveal considerable variation across and within religious traditions" (p. 1244). It is clear from all the identified literature that the subject of Christian beliefs and perspectives on the environment are significantly nuanced and requiring of more in-depth study than a typical quantitative survey can provide.

While the results of many of these studies are mixed, there are several common themes that can be gathered from them. One is that the level of ideology of an individual (on a conservative-liberal scale) may greatly influence religious attitudes and beliefs and should be included in future research. The second major conclusion from these findings is that the constructs under consideration can greatly impact the results and there is a fair amount of doubt over the validity of many of the constructs used in a number of past studies. Many of the constructs used were developed by pulling pre-existing data and fitting the construct to the data that was available. Many of the studies provided Cronbach's alpha scores just above minimum levels of acceptability, but in each case the authors decided they were "good enough" raising the question as to how valid and reliable are these results for genuinely testing the White hypothesis? Future research is needed in this area that ensures consistency between the intended constructs and the actual constructs in

research related to values, attitudes and beliefs regarding religion and the environment.

### **Shortcomings of Past Research**

Additionally, there are also several shortcomings of the past research efforts. In addition to those previously mentioned, it is important to acknowledge that very little research has been conducted with clergy members. Considering they are the formally educated experts in their field, it is reasonable to include them in research to understand the perspective of Christians. Further, considering how varied the findings have been of past research, it is apparent a different technique is needed to make clearer determinations. This is also where a final shortcoming connects, and that is the lack of qualitative research on the subject. Given that much of the past research has been quantitative, how can it be determined that those studies are asking the appropriate questions? When little knowledge is available or the past research is consistently varied, it seems reasonable to undertake a qualitative assessment to develop a clearer understanding of the subject. The current research study helps to fill that existing void.

### **Conclusion**

From this review of the literature, it is apparent that while a significant amount of research has been done attempting to determine if Christians are in fact anti-environment as White posited or if Christians previously held such a perspective but have since become "greener", the results are incredibly varied. Furthermore, more research is calling for different methodology to be used to study the relationship between religion and the environment. When this is combined with the increased attention to the moral aspects of environmental degradation, it is only reasonable to see the increased attention to faith-based organizations. Many such organizations are stepping up themselves and providing their perspective, but

additional research is necessary. A qualitative study based in both the findings of past research and grounded in the perspectives of the experts themselves is an ideal method to move forward the topic of religion and the environment and the relationship between the two and increase understanding. Additionally, basing the study in the Phoenix metropolitan area offers the opportunity to increase the understanding of perspectives on the environmental issues within the ever-growing desert city that will either refute or support the reputation of the “World’s Least Sustainable City”.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

The current study is a qualitative research project focusing on members of the Christian clergy within the Phoenix metro area. This chapter will outline the research methods utilized within the current study, why they were selected, what other methods were also considered and why those were ultimately not chosen, and what are the limitations of current research.

Several primary reasons exist for selecting a qualitative study for this particular project and while listed here, each will be explained in further detail. First, very few qualitative studies have been done to date, especially with clergy, leaving this area of study ripe for attention. Second, due to the perception that the leaders of faith-based organizations are influential individuals, a need exists to develop a deeper understanding of their perspectives. Finally, because the perspectives of clergy have not been previously studied and are unclear, a quantitative format would not have been effective to gather information as not enough information is known to form questions for a quantitative format.

#### **Why Clergy?**

Members of the clergy were selected as the focus of this study to increase the understanding of the perspectives of leaders of faith-based organizations. To date, very few studies have been done focusing on clergy, which results in little to no knowledge of their perspectives on various issues and topics. As leaders of their respective congregations, clergy are potentially an influential group and not knowing where they stand on a number of issues facing society is a significant gap. If they have the potential to influence members of their congregations on issues such as abortion, marriage, and, in some cases, elected officials, why would the clergy not

also be able to influence members on environmental issues such as climate change and water? Attempting to increase the understanding of clergy is essential in making progress on a number of issues facing society today.

Additionally, members of the clergy are frequently seen as community leaders. They are respected and seen as moral guides for many within and outside of their congregations as well. Much in the way that doctors are provided a certain amount of respect based solely on their title, members of the clergy are afforded a similar level of respect. Members of the clergy are perceived by many to hold a special position of authority and their perspectives are also given greater weight. Because of this position of authority and respect, people seek out members of the clergy for guidance on many issues, especially those they perceive to be of moral consequence. As environmental issues are increasingly being considered a moral issue, it is reasonable to posit that more people will seek out clergy members for their guidance. The Pope's encyclical on the environment is a clear example of a leader of a faith-based organization providing guidance on how followers should perceive and act regarding the environment. And while the Pope's encyclical received considerable attention, as previously noted, many other faith-based organizations have provided guidance for their members. Considering this position of authority and perception of being community leaders, it is important to directly seek the clergy's perspectives on a number of issues.

As a final reason for selecting clergy as the focus of this research study, members of the clergy are almost always highly educated in their field and would be considered experts on their respective faiths. While the specific details may be slightly different within each respective organization, the typical education for a future clergy member is essentially the same. An individual would attend four years of university to earn a bachelor's degree before attending and additional three to

four years of graduate school to earn a master's degree, most often a Master of Divinity degree. The formal education is also supplemented with practical "on the job" experience in the form of an internship of sorts. By the time an individual typically becomes an ordained member of the clergy, they are highly trained on all aspects of their faith and would certainly meet even the most rigorous definition of an expert. As such, when seeking out the perspective of an otherwise under-researched group, the most logical starting point would be the experts in the field. In this instance, the experts on Christianity are members of the clergy.

Once the selection was made to focus on clergy members as the sample population, it was clear that a qualitative study would be the most reasonable and effective approach for one particular reason noted above. Very little research has been done to date with members of the clergy and even less that attempted to gain their broad perspective on a number of issues. When little information is known about a population or phenomenon, a qualitative research format is frequently considered most appropriate. Such an approach allows the researcher to be open to what the areas of concern are and allow the participants to lead the discovery of information. Once the decision was made to use a qualitative approach, more specific details of the research plan were necessary, including ruling out other possible approaches.

### **Other Possible Methods**

Several other methods were considered for this study but were ruled out. First, a quantitative approach was considered. Unfortunately, due to the limited information available, there was not sufficient evidence to develop a quantitative survey that would accurately provide the desired data. Furthermore, attempts to utilize an existing dataset would merely be repeating the previous studies, not



adding to the understanding nor clarifying the concepts. Given this, a quantitative approach was eliminated from consideration for the current study.

Participant observation was also considered as a possible option as well. Several issues caused this method to be eliminated however. First, gathering the data necessary would have required attending church services to observe the sermon and would provide just a single snapshot of a moment in time, which may not accurately reflect the activity, resulting in potentially biased data. Additionally, as most churches meet at approximately the same time (Sunday mornings), it would have been extremely difficult to collect sufficient data.

### **Study Overview and Goals**

The current research study intended to assess to primary questions. First, what values and beliefs do clergy hold in relation to environmental problems and stewardship? The intent of this question was to test the White Hypothesis, but also to gain a deeper understanding of what perspective is of clergy members as it broadly relates to the environment. This information would benefit the future research endeavors in the topic as it would provide a baseline understanding of the perspective of the experts in the field. The second research question intended to identify if clergy see a role for the church in working to alleviate environmental problems or to promote environmental stewardship, and what they feel their role may be in that undertaking. This information would be beneficial to understand what activities faith-based organizations may be willing and interested to participate in, as well as what assistance they may be needing to undertake such activities. The following discussion outlines the research methods used to seek the answers to these questions.

## **Sample Strategy**

For the current research study, Christians were selected as the sample group for several reasons. First, Christians make up the largest religious group within the Phoenix metro area, as well as the United States as a whole. While the United States has inhabitants of almost every religion, the vast majority identify themselves as Christian (~78% in 2007 according to the Pew Research Center and ~77% in 2012 according to a Gallup poll). This figure is significantly larger than the next highest group, those with no religious belief (atheist/agnostic). Given these numbers, previous research regarding religion and the environment in the US has focused solely on Christians and/or Judeo-Christians. While not to discredit the impact of non-Christian religious groups, given the large numbers of Christians, their potential for impact is greater (again, looking solely at raw numbers) and therefore, understanding the Christian perspective on environmental activities is of vital importance. As a primary goal of the study was to increase the understanding of perspectives from a significant portion of the population, Christians are essential to include given their large population.

Second, Christians have a shared primary source for their beliefs in The Bible. All Christian denominations use the Bible as the foundation for their beliefs, and this shared source provides a consistent baseline source from which to work from. Third, the requirements to become a member of the clergy (and therefore, an "expert" in the profession) are relatively consistent among all Christian denominations. As previously described, typically, to become an ordained minister, an individual is required to complete a bachelor's degree before attending and completing a seminary program (3-4 years of formal, graduate education) leading to a Master of Divinity degree. The Divinity degree (or an equivalent) is almost universally required within Christian denominations in order to be an ordained member of the clergy.

While some denominations have specific schools and programs leading to a Divinity degree, many universities offer general, non-denominational specific degrees. The educational requirement also provides a consistent baseline for responses.

The current study also required certain groups to be excluded. First, any non-Christian faiths were eliminated, as previously discussed. From this point, the inclusion of the Bible as the primary source material was an additional criterion, and two primary denominations/faiths were impacted by this, the Jewish faith and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (commonly known as LDS or Mormons). While the Jewish faith has the same origins as Christianity, the Jewish faith uses only the first section of the Bible, the Old Testament or the Torah as they refer to it. While this provides a certain amount of common ground, the fact that only part of the source material is included as the foundation of the faith, does result in significant differences. As such, including the perspective of the Jewish faith does not allow for comparison for the current study.

In a similar, yet different way, the Latter-Day Saints also were excluded from the current study partially due to their source material for their foundation of their faith. While the LDS faith does use the Bible in its entirety, they also have a second additional book that forms the majority of their beliefs, *The Book of Mormon*. In a similar way to the Jewish faith, this addition impacts the baseline source for comparison in regards to the current study. Additionally, the LDS faith has a different structure for determining their clergy members. Unlike what is typical for the Christian or Jewish faiths, LDS clergy are members of the church that are elected to their position on a rotating basis, and still maintain their regular "day job" during that time period. While they do have some additional educational aspects that the faith dictates, generally speaking, their profession is whatever position they hold outside of the church. As such, the previously discussed aspect of clergy being

experts in their field and educated as such does not hold true for members of the Latter-Day Saint faith. Considering these conditions, the Latter-Day Saints were excluded from the current research study.

The final group that was excluded from the current study were independent and non-denominational churches, with the caveat of non-denominational mega churches (those with 2000 or more members). As independent churches are unique organizations that may not adhere to any common or established belief system, it would not be possible to compare them to other participants. Further, if they do not adhere to a belief system that is able to be verified outside of themselves, there is no way to establish the validity of their responses to the study questions. As such, independent churches were not included in the current research study. Mega churches however, by definition, have a large number of members and therefore, their clergy potentially have considerable influence, if one considers that on any given week, they likely reach several thousand individuals. Furthermore, such churches frequently reach such large sizes by having what is considered "charismatic" leadership, thus potentially increasing the level of influence. As a final note, while non-denominational churches typically have a more independent and different organizational system than the denominational churches, in some cases, mega churches are linked, creating a network of "like-minded" churches sharing common principles, increasing the opportunities for comparison. All the mega churches included in this study fit this last characteristic.

A purposive sample for the denominations was used to identify the most dominant religious traditions within the Phoenix metro area. One intention of this research study is to gain understanding of the role of clergy in potentially being agents of change within/for their respective congregations and communities, so selecting the religious traditions with the largest number of adherents is the most

logical choice. Smaller religious traditions or denominations may possibly be very active, but with small numbers their potential for influence is more limited than that of larger traditions. Once the initial groups were selected, it was necessary to develop a population from which to generate the sample. In this case, a list of churches within the Phoenix metropolitan area was needed. Initially, a GIS-based database of Christian churches was accessed from the Arizona State University GIS Spatial Data Repository for 2012. This database consisted of approximately 2000 churches and included location information as well. Unfortunately, once it was reviewed, substantial mistakes and inconsistencies were discovered, and this database was not able to be utilized. As a result, it was necessary to generate a unique database of church information. In order to accomplish this, information from the Association of Religious Data Archives was combined with a Google search to identify all the churches located within the Phoenix metro area.

According to the Association of Religious Data Archives, in 2010 the population of the Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale Metropolitan area was 4,192,887 and the total number of known adherents to a religion was 1,573,094 (ARDA, 2010). This accounts for 37.5% of the total population in the area and is a figure more than capable of influencing decision making in the region. Christian churches specifically are able to be divided into three primary groups: Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Evangelical Protestant. Within the Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale area, the largest groups are Protestants- both Mainline and Evangelical (approx. 671,000 members) and Catholics (approx. 560,000 members) which comprise a total of approximately 78% of the population known to adhere to a religion, and consequently, the most significantly sized religious group to include in for the current study. Both the Mainline and Evangelical Protestants can be further divided by denomination, such as United Methodist and the Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod. The largest

denominations within the Protestant designation were selected for inclusion in the study (see Table 1).

Evangelical Protestant
Non-denominational (Mega Churches only)
Assemblies of God
Southern Baptist Convention
Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod
Mainline Protestant
United Methodist Church, The
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Table 1. Denominations included.

The Roman Catholic Church is rarely subdivided, and in the case of this research study, only the Roman Catholic Church (henceforth referred to only as the Catholic Church or Catholics) was included. The other variants are Orthodox churches, specifically Greek and Russian, and do not have a significant membership within the Phoenix metro area.

In order to find as comprehensive a list of churches as possible, the Google search was conducted using the specific denominational names. Frequently, a list of all churches within a specific group could be identified via the state or national website of the respective denomination. A list of all churches within a denomination was then compiled, and then combined with all the other denominations within the respective category (Mainline or Evangelical). A total of 671 churches was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet and ordered by denomination. An online random number generator was then used to select churches to include in the sample. If a church was selected more than once, the church immediately above it in the spreadsheet was selected instead. A total of 105 churches were ultimately contacted for participation in the current research study. The contact methods were developed based on recommendations outlined in Bernard (2011) and Creswell (2007 and 2009).

## **Contact Methods**

Once the list of churches was compiled, the first contact was made via email. The websites for each church listed either a general contact email or an email for the clergy members. If a church had more than one clergy member listed, the highest ranking was selected for contact. It was not always explicitly noted who the most senior clergy member was, but frequently there was a page with a message from one of the pastors; in these instances, this was the individual chosen. The email was addressed to the specific pastor, if known, and requested their participation in a research study assessing the perspectives of clergy members regarding the community (a sample is included in Appendix A). They were requested to respond to the email if they were interested in participating in the study. If they responded agreeing to participate, an interview was scheduled. If they declined to participate, they were logged into a spreadsheet noting such and if they provided a reason. If, after two weeks, no response had occurred, a second contact was made.

The second contact included a follow up email as well as a phone call to the church office. The email was an abbreviated version of the original email (see Appendix A) and indicated that they were recently contacted to participate in the research study. It also noted that a phone call to the office would occur within 24-48 hours. The phone call occurred only if there was no response to the second email. In the phone call, the caller was identified as a student at Arizona State University conducting doctoral research and requesting the participation of the head clergy member or another clergy member as available and willing to participate. In the course of these phone calls, the initial contact was almost exclusively a front office staff member who served as a "gatekeeper" for the clergy members. Unfortunately, as the direct line to the clergy members was very rarely made publicly available, email was the only direct access to them. Phone calls were not an effective method

for contacting clergy members, with the exception of when they had agreed to participate. In one instance however, even when the clergy member had agreed to participate in the research study, the office person who initially answered the phone was reluctant to pass the call on to the pastor. Once this person was assured the pastor had provided consent, the interview was able to be scheduled.

Third attempts to contact clergy members were rare, as usually the two previous email attempts and follow up phone call were sufficient to illicit a response. However, in the rare instances when a third attempt was needed, it consisted of one final email and a phone call. The email indicated this was the final attempt and if an alternative email address was able to be identified (such as for another clergy member, or an office manager or similar) they were also included in the email. A phone call occurred 24 hours later if no email response. If there was no response, the church was removed from the contact list.

While it was considered to utilize a mailout of some variety to request participation, the lack of success in getting past the front office staff was determined to be a roadblock. Any mailings were almost certainly processed by office staff and if they were responsible, either officially or unofficially, in restricting access to the clergy members, a mailing would not be successful. Additional participants were sought via an online survey, which is discussed below. While a total of 20 individuals agreed to participate, four were not able to schedule an interview time; as such a total of 16 interviews were secured and included in this research study. While this is a small participation rate, and lower than anticipated, the saturation point was reached and exceeded in the study. Based on the findings of Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), it was anticipated that saturation would be reached by the completion of 12 interviews and in this case, saturation was reached at interview 13.



Two additional interviews occurred to ensure this point had been reached and one additional interview was already scheduled in advance.

### **Pretest**

In order to try to ensure the interview protocol was assessing the desired information, a pretest was conducted. The draft survey was provided to two clergy members who otherwise did not participate in the study. The questions were asked and evaluated afterwards by the clergy member and the interviewer, along with the provided responses. Any issues of confusion or unnecessary ambiguity were adjusted. Discussion and general comments were also provided. Both clergy members provided an explanation of what they believed the intent of the questions were and any areas of concern they may have had. As a final assessment, the final interview protocol was provided to a participating clergy member and the responses were compared to those provided in the pretest to ensure consistency.

### **Interviews**

In advance of the interviews, as little specific information was provided as possible. As noted previously, the initial email only indicated that the research was to assess their perspectives on the community and issues that were important to them. The environmental aspect of the interview was not initially disclosed, if possible, to try to ensure the participants were as honest and non-biased as possible. In several instances however, the clergy member requested more information either before agreeing to participate or in a couple instances, at the start of the interview. Typically, the additional information requested before agreeing to participate was a copy of the interview questions. These were provided a total of three times, with two individuals declining to participate once receiving the questions and one agreeing. One member who declined to participate did so within 24 hours of receiving the interview questions; the other declined several weeks later upon the direction of a

supervisory board within the church. The one clergy member who requested the interview questions in advance did so to ensure there was nothing members of the congregation would find problematic for him to spend work hours participating. This clergy member also requested to keep a copy of the interview questions and all contact information in the event any member requested them.

The interviews were scheduled in advance, at the convenience of the clergy member. All the interviews were conducted at the respective clergy members church office. While the initial estimate was that each interview would take approximately one hour, in many instances, the interviews ran significantly longer, averaging an hour and a half, with several lasting over two hours. Several were shorter, and this was typically because the participant had another appointment scheduled immediately afterward. One exception to this was a participant who provided atypically short responses (compared to other participants) and who also was the only individual who acknowledged they took issue with several interview questions. In this instance, the clergy member expressed frustration with a pre-existing tool included in the interview. The interviewer noted they did not develop the instrument (the revised New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) scale from Dunlap et al., 2000) and could not provide concrete reasons for the wording of the questions, especially as it was designed to assess an individual's environmental orientation, but the participant did not find this helpful. The opportunity to explain and clarify responses to the revised NEP (Dunlap et al., 2000) questions was also refused by the participant in this instance as they viewed the questions to be "biased" and "leading" and "a waste of time" so the interviewed noted the responses as declined to answer. No other instances of refusal to response to questions occurred during the research study.

The interview questions were divided into four sections as well as a section on demographics (the full survey is provided in Appendix B). Questions on

interpretation/explanation of specific Bible verses and statements from religious leaders were given with the goal of understanding how different religious denominations perceive several statements and verses typically used to justify either a pro- or anti-environmental perspective. A second section was used to understand what activities the churches participate in and what issues are important to them to provide information on the values of the church as well as behaviors. A third section of questions was provided with the intention of determining an understanding of the attitudes of the church, via a series of agree/disagree statements (using the full 15-question revised NEP, Dunlap et al., 2000) and why they responded as such. A fourth series of questions was asked specifically regarding issues of landscape and water use within the Phoenix context. This was then followed up with a series of demographical questions about the church as well as the clergy member themselves to be able to assess any possible biases after the fact. Finally, the participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the interviewer if they were so inclined. This also was when the interviewer provided the follow up information required by the University's office on human subject research, which also elicited additional questions frequently.

All interviewees were provided with the opportunity to ask questions about the research study or the questions contained within the interview. As the interviews were audio recorded, several participants requested the recorder be turned off after the completion of the formal interview, but many did not. Information discussed during the post-interview conversation was not included in the analysis, unless the participant specifically referenced something from the interview, for example, noting they had something additional to say. Very few instances occurred of this however. Immediately after the conclusion of the interview, notes and key points were written down to ensure initial impressions were not lost during the data collection. While

these notes were not formally used during the analysis, they helped to provide additional support or clarification to the overall interview.

After completion of the interview, the audio recording was saved with a codename to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents. The names of the clergy members and their respective churches are not used within this study, per the information provided to the participants in advance of the interview. The interviews were then transcribed in an edited format. While no substantive information was excluded from the interview, mentions of words such as “um” or “hmm” were not included. This was to improve the readability of the transcriptions during analysis. If there were significant pauses during the interview, this was noted as well. No other additional information was included in the transcriptions in order to keep them as objective as possible. Once the transcription was complete, each was reviewed fully for accuracy and any errors were corrected. This ensured the transcripts were accurate depictions of the interviews and provided an initial overview of the research data before formal analysis.

### **Online Survey**

While a sufficient number of interviews were completed to ensure that the saturation point was reached, there was a noticeable lack of participation from one particularly large denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention (Southern Baptists). Within the Phoenix metro area, Southern Baptists comprise a relatively significant portion of the adherent population and two targets, additional attempts to encourage their participation occurred.

The first attempt was the development of an abbreviated survey that could be completed online instead of via an in-person interview. The intention of this was that the online survey would be both shorter in time commitment and allow for the participant to remain anonymous. To develop the online survey, the in-person

interview questions were reviewed, and any questions determined to be non-essential to the integrity of the study were removed. This resulted in a total of 10 questions. Several of the initial questions were slightly rephrased to be closed-ended questions as opposed to the original open-ended version. As the questions were essentially the same, no additional pretesting of the online survey was conducted. The initial request for completing the online survey was sent to several of the Southern Baptist churches originally contacted, but who had not yet reached the three contact attempt limits. Additional Southern Baptist churches were also contacted with a request to participate in just the online survey. The response rate was zero.

As an additional attempt for participation, a former clergy member and leader of a local Southern Baptist organization was contacted to make a direct request for assistance in obtaining participation. This individual agreed to contact current Southern Baptist pastors and request their participation. The intention was that by being “vetted” by an insider to their overall organization, there would be an increase in willingness to participate in the study. This was initially considered successful as twelve Southern Baptist clergy members agreed to participate in the research via the online survey. All twelve were provided a link to the survey, via email within 24 hours of agreeing to participate. The email (see appendix X) thanked them for their participation and noted the survey was expected to be brief, only two responses were ultimately received. Due to the extremely minimal data provided with only two responses, the online survey data was excluded from the study.

### **Analysis of Interviews**

The analysis of the interviews followed an iterative format, noted below. As the interview questions were developed as a combination of inductive and deductive concepts, the analysis followed a similar format. Several concepts were immediately

developed into codes for analysis and others were developed while reviewing the interview transcripts. A full list of codes is provided in Table 2 in the next chapter.

The starting point for each interview was an initial review of the transcript. This was a separate review of the transcript from the review for accuracy. During this review, no notes or codes were formulated. Instead, the initial review provided a baseline for a summary of each interview. This allowed the substantial amount of information to be condensed down into the particularly significant data. The summary was then compared against the original transcript to ensure no essential or significant information was missing or changed.

Once each interview was summarized, the first round of coding was initiated. The qualitative coding software of MaxQDA was used to code each transcript. As previously mentioned, a list of several codes based on topics noted in the literature review were developed. This list included the following codes:

- Subdue/Dominion: this includes references to control, superiority, hierarchy, or similar over the environment, including animals and vegetation. This would also include control over people, groups, or communities.
- Stewardship: this includes references to taking care of, protecting, or overseeing the environment, including animals and vegetation. References to taking care of things not related to the environment are not included here and would instead be coded as "Responsibility".
- Responsibility: this includes references to an obligation or being tasked to manage something. This includes obligations beyond the environment, such as towards people, groups, and communities.

Each of these was based on concepts frequently discussed in the literature as being common issues within the topical area of religion and the environment. Based on these previously identified codes, each transcript was analyzed for references to each and coded appropriately.

The remaining codes were developed through reading the transcripts. Concepts that occurred at least three times within a single interview were noted as were any issues that the participants specifically noted as being significant. Once a new code was added, previously reviewed transcripts were again reviewed for instances of the new code. Once any individual transcript was reviewed in its entirety, the coded segments were reviewed separately for consistency with the specific code. If a segment did not appear to align with the code upon further review, it was eliminated. In some instances, codes were also merged together as they were inter-connected concepts too difficult to distinctly justify their own code. The final list of codes is noted in Table 2.

The process for reviewing the transcripts and coding was an iterative process. Each transcript was independently analyzed at least three times, and this process was repeated as needed until there was consistency among all the codes and no coded segments were ambiguous. Segments could be coded with more than one code, but in such cases, it was reviewed to ensure both codes were not interconnected and were distinct. Once the codes were final, the codes and coded segments were reviewed for any discernable themes. The themes, along with a brief description are noted in Chapter 4.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Ensuring both the validity and reliability of the data in this study was essential. The description of reliability as provided by Creswell was most appropriate for this study as it notes that "... qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's

approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (2009, p. 190). To best ensure reliability, this study adhered to two primary the recommendations provided by Bernard (2011) and Creswell (2007 and 2009): ensuring the accuracy of the transcriptions and developing and adhering to a codebook. Each transcription was reviewed at least twice for accuracy before any analysis began. If any changes were needed, an additional review was conducted on the transcript. In conjunction with the guidance of Bernard (2011) and Creswell (2007 and 2009), a codebook was also developed. Codes were noted, along with a brief description and possible examples, and this reference was utilized throughout the analysis process.

While some qualitative researchers argue that validity in qualitative research is a non-issue as validity “... is not a single, fixed, or universal concept” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 602), it is still necessary to determine certain measures to increase the likelihood of validity in a qualitative study. While Creswell acknowledged that few studies would be able to use all eight techniques, the use of at least two was recommended; the current study utilized four of the eight recommended techniques by Creswell (2007 and 2009). A brief description of the recommended technique and how it was applied in the current study are discussed below.

Triangulation was the first technique used and is the use of multiple and different sources, investigations, and methods to provide justification and evidence. In the current study, information was gathered from existing literature and compared against the interview data. Additionally, formal policy statements from the higher-level faith-based organizations, usually the national body of the church, were used to compare the results of the interviews, if available. While the independent, mega-churches did not have such statements, the other denominations included did have policy statements. These also allowed for comparison among each



denomination (i.e. Catholic to Catholic or United Methodist to United Methodist), though this is not included in the study. The use of multiple and different sources increases the validity of the current study.

The next technique recommended by Creswell that was utilized is the use of rich, thick description that allows the reader to determine validity for themselves. The chapter on the analysis of the interviews in particular, as well as the discussion chapter, provide a significance number of direct quotes from the participants, to provide support for the conclusions drawn in the study. Providing the quotes allows the reader to use their own judgement regarding the statements made and the resulting conclusions and themes.

A third technique used was including negative or discrepant information, which makes the information more realistic, and therefore, by Creswell's (2007 and 2009) standards, more valid. While many of the participants shared similar perspectives on the questions and issues presented during the interviews, some were significantly different and possibly even counter to the viewpoints expressed by others. This information was still included and presented in the analysis section. Including these conflicting perspectives helps increase the validity by presenting a truthful portrayal of the data.

The final technique utilized in the current study was the use of an external audit, which entails having someone not familiar with the research or researcher review the study to provide an objective assessment of the procedures and outcomes. A draft version of the study, including the final analysis, themes, and discussion, was provided to another member of the clergy, outside the study area and who was without prior knowledge of the study or the researcher. This reviewer provided an objective assessment and stated support for the accuracy of both the methods utilized and the results.

Considering the use of the recommended techniques, the validity and quality of the current study can be determined to be fully supported. Additionally, using the previously provided assertion from Lincoln and Guba that "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter," (1985, p. 316), the support for validity of this study also necessitates a finding of reliability.

### **Limitations**

While every reasonable measure was taken into account and mitigated, there are several limitations to the current research study that must be acknowledged. First, the dataset is relatively small. A total of sixteen interviews were conducted and included within this study. As previously noted, the saturation point was exceeded, but the sample size is too limited to allow for broader application. This study however, is an initial first step and is filling a noteworthy gap in previous research. The small dataset allowed for the significant level of depth into each interview that would not otherwise have been possible with a larger sample, which provides a solid baseline for future study in the area.

A second limitation important to mention is that the current study is focused only within the Phoenix metro area. A number of concerns, especially the environmental issues in particular, may be quite location specific, which may impact the broader application of the findings. Phoenix is extremely automobile-centered, with a sprawling metropolis that does not necessarily facilitate convenient coordination between groups. It is entirely possible the findings of the current study could be significantly different in a different location. Additional research is still needed to compare the perspectives of other locations.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that there was limited participation from differing church denominations. The denominations of Christianity can be broadly

placed on a spectrum with certain groups being more liberal and others being more conservative. While reasonable attempts were made to achieve as much balance in denominations as possible, the more conservative-leaning denominations were overall less inclined to participate. The result is slightly more left leaning denominations and clergy members comprising the dataset. Additionally, as previously discussed, non-Christian religious groups were not included in the current study and that may also impact the findings overall. Additional research into a broader range of faith-based organizations is needed moving forward.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion provided an in-depth outline of the research methods utilized in the current study as well as support for why those methods were selected. This chapter explained the choice of a qualitative methodology, as well as reasoning for the sample population. A description of how the interviewees were selected, what information they were provided with in advance, and how the interviews were conducted is presented along with how the data was then analyzed. The following chapter presents the findings of that analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

From the interviews, it is evident that the concept of “community” is the most important issue for the participants in this research study. Community was the most frequently coded from the interviews, occurring nearly 300 separate times. The theme of community would also become apparent with the rest of the analysis, with nearly every other concept linking back to it.

#### **Data Descriptions**

A total of 15 interviews were analyzed for the current research study, as previously discussed. From these interviews, a total of 19 codes, plus three sub-codes, were utilized (see Table 2 for the full code list). Using these 22 codes, each interview was analyzed and a total of 2150 coded segments resulted, including the three sub-codes, while a total of 1849 segments existed once the sub-codes were removed from consideration. The three sub-codes were specific aspects of the environment (water, landscape, and beauty) that were identified to be part of a generalized description of the environment, but that were unique enough to also be standalone concepts. For purposes of the analysis, the sub-codes were removed from consideration as they are significantly connected to the code of “environment” and could potentially result in an overweighing of that concept in comparison to others. In other words, while the codes are important and included in the overall discussion later in the study, they were removed from part of the analysis to not “tip the scales” in favor of environmental concepts.

<b>Code</b>	<b># of Segments</b>	<b># of Documents</b>
Community	298	15
Activities	243	15
Environment	214	15
Values	184	15
Responsibility	175	15
Stewardship	160	14
Under-utilization & Issues	156	15
Concern for Others	91	15
Fiscal	63	13
Poverty	49	14
Subdue & Dominion	43	14
Politics	28	7
Safety	27	11
Race & Nationality Issues	26	11
Concerns of religion & faith	26	8
Expertise & Knowledge	22	7
Education	20	4
Cultural Issues	16	8
Translation or Misinterpretation	8	4

Table 2: List of codes (excluding sub-codes), segments coded, and number of interviews included with the code.

As can be seen in Table 2, the most frequently occurring codes are Community, Activities, Environment, Values, and Responsibility. These five codes comprise a total of 60 percent of the total coded segments, and, are an indication of the most significant areas of importance for the participants in the research study. The next most frequently occurring codes of Underutilization and Issues, Concern for Others, Stewardship, Poverty, and Subdue and Dominion, provide additional awareness of the concepts concerning clergy members in the Phoenix metro area and connect to previous research studies in the area of religion and the environment. The codes of Stewardship and Subdue and Dominion in particular are some of the most frequently discussed within past research and were codes developed from the review of the

literature. These five codes comprise a total of 27 percent of the coded segments, and in total, the ten most frequently occurring codes account for 87 percent of the total coded segments. A description of each code is included below before a discussion of the themes that were generated from the codes.

### **Codes**

The following is a list of each of the codes and sub-codes used in the analysis of the interviews of the clergy members. For each, the code is provided, along with a brief description, examples of the code from the interviews, and how many times that code occurred in the dataset. The codes are provided in alphabetical order.

Activities- 243: This code was used to notate any endeavors or undertakings of the church community, including individual and group actions as well as both things that officially and unofficially were sponsored and/or organized by the church.

*"We do something called First Wednesday, which on the first Wednesday of every month we have a faith and culture night. We'll bring up a lot of these issues and we'll bring in speakers, panels. We'll do text-in questions. Then with each of those, we're giving people tangible opportunities to engage that issue. That's more of an equipping and awareness. But it's been a significant one because a lot of people engage these things because of opportunities we're connecting them to, but we're not running it. We're not running the program or whatever."-Eddie*

*"I think there's maybe 10, 10 people, and they meet once a month. They got together first of all to read the papal document and then to start reflecting on the impact it could have on our property. So for example, I think in the fall we're going to be selling bags, bags that are cloth, and they're always looking around for things that we can do, recycling and what have you."-Mark*

Beauty- 37: This code was used as a sub-code to "environment" and was used to denote any specific references to aesthetics or visual appeal of the environment.

*"It's very basic, just because of budgetary constraints we're not able to make it as nice as we would like. So, I think it's serviceable but it's not – I wouldn't say it's necessary appealing, it's just serviceable."*-Sean

*"Then we would love to continue to be intentional about the different types of plants that we plant, that have both function and beauty to them."*-Eddie

*"I think it's visibly attractive, yeah. I think it communicates planning. I think it communicates care. It's well-cared for."*-Andrew

*"I would like to see something flowering. A lot. Green. You know, because I think that's kind of like, you know, I mean, a, a person is meant to flower, so to speak, flourish."*-Alan

Community- 298: This code was used to denote any members of group activities, or a sense of shared connection among a group. This also included any group with common interests, values, or space as well as a neighborhood.

*"We believe in partnering. We have, what, 13 self-help groups on campus right now. And only one of them is sponsored by the church, but all of them are important to the community and to the church."*-Wendy

*"But the churches and synagogues, mosques, can be drivers of the community. So, they're a good way for some of these issues to gain greater support together and help a whole community deal with an issue together and some of us lead the way. So, just because we have access to so many people instantly and when it gels with who we are, which I think you'll see that across the board, then we can work together."*-David

*"We try to do that one very much by acknowledging our differences, not just by saying, we're all human beings – which is absolutely true and we'll emphasize that –*

*but really trying to say the community that we live in has people that have different views and that's a real thing and we still need to figure out how to live together in a way that we all thrive."-Scott*

Concern for Others- 91: This code was used to designate having worry or concerns about other people, groups, and/or communities.

*"Everything is integrated. So, in the Encyclical letter, there's something for everybody to love and everybody to hate, no matter what side of the political spectrum you're on. But he did, he showed we can't talk about ecology and caring for the environment if we trash human ecology and how we treat human beings and the dignity of the human person. They go hand-in-hand."-David*

*"Furthermore, Jesus says the greatest thing that we can do, the highest commandment, is to love God with everything and love our neighbor as ourselves. I'm paraphrasing. Knowing that our neighbors are breathing air, drinking water, eating food exposed to whatever's in the air, we cannot love our neighbors without having concern for the environment because their life and their flourishing is dependent on that."-Eddie*

Concerns of Religion- 26: This code was used to notate any concerns or worry about issues related to religion and/or faith, within the church and/or greater society.

*"So, they feel whether or not they're being told is one thing, but they're kind of feeling they need to be quiet about their belief systems, particularly their ethical and moral systems. So, that's the way it's starting to look."-David*

*"I mean, we, ourselves, have lived in certain ways that – probably have lived way more out of fear, and fright, and treated people bad. And so, some of this, the church is – some of the barriers that the Church is experiencing are erected that they can't control. Some of them are reaping what we've sown of not doing well, in the past."-Scott*



*"If you want to be a preacher, a pastor, if you want to have a church, you just have to have the Bible and an ego and there's a lot of people in my profession who say they're pastors who, when I throw a fairly easy question at them, they don't know whether it's in the Bible or not. They don't know what they're talking about and they're promoting a theology that is destructive, self-serving, profitable, and attractive to a lot of people. They're selling bullshit."*-Andrew

Cultural Issues- 16: This code was utilized to denote any issues or concerns with different cultures. This was different from issues of race and/or nationality and was used primarily when the respondent acknowledged a cultural issue.

*"I think the biggest one is just the overall fracturing of the community fabric. By community fabric, I just mean the way in which the people relate to each other. I mean, I think this is really being – it's made bigger by the fact that all of the migrations of people to cities, in what globalization is doing to our cities, of making them far more highly differentiated. I mean, the difference now, I think, is unparalleled globally, and then, definitely, in Arizona, and our, you know, local society. Arizona's just not – and Phoenix is not even close to the same place it was 20 years ago."*-Scott

*"So, if what I want to do is conquer the between 10 and 20 million Native Americans living on a continent, I would begin to incorporate into my religious speak the idea that God has given this to us, the white people. That's exactly what happened in this country and we have a couple of million remaining Native Americans and the genocide that was justified by religious speak."*-Andrew

*"I would say some of the major social problems would be the lack of hospitality that refugees are receiving, in particular, and the increasing hostility towards Muslims, towards refugees, those sorts of things. I think that's one major social one."*-Eddie

Education- 20: This code was used to denote references to the need to be educating themselves or others or of the significance of education.

*"Primarily what we have done has focused on teaching. Our charter, who we are as an institution, is primarily a teaching and equipping institution. So, to some degree, when we start running programs and stuff that are – versus partnering with organizations that do, we're kind of getting out of the scope of what we can do."*-

*Eddie*

*"Yes, part of it is, for ourselves to be educated, is that the church – our churches – let me speak specifically to that – though I think it'd reflect on wider churches, like ours, have not been the most educated on societal challenges or problems before. So, I think one of the things we have to immediately do is take posture of learning. So, what we are specifically doing is trying to put ourselves in environments with people with more experience and expertise on these issues to be educated. So, we're trying to be educated, and you try to do it as best as you can on a multi-faceted – let's, for simplicity, say, both-sides-of-the-issue way."*-Scott

*"We've had some forums, like, kind of, again, educational forums, trying to bring in multiple perspectives to inform people. I mean – I mean this, in all seriousness, and I think one of the – it is what I just said; I just don't think we think about it enough. So, part of the role of the Church that, "un poquito," small step we can take is to get us just to start thinking about it, whatever side, just like, we've got to think about these things because I, just, think we're in a place where the bulk of our population in our churches, which I think is reflective of outside, sadly – we just don't think about it. We think about ourselves."*-Scott

Environment- 214: This code was used to notate any discussions about the environment, landscape, or physical setting. This may include the physical

environment, but also the general concept of environmentalism or environmentally linked concepts.

*"We're appointed as caretakers of the overall environment, as opposed to exploiters of it."-David*

*"Part of our responsibility, part of my feeling about how people should treat the environment is that we preserve the environment so that the next generations can see what we see, and we preserve land untouched so that future generations can experience the blessings we experience."-Robert*

*"There's explicit commands, all throughout scripture, about the importance of caring for the environment. So, if obedience is a central part of your faith, then it would be being disobedient and that would be sin."-Eddie*

*"That's one reason why here, they love worshipping outside because it helps place us in God's creation while we worship, which I think is very meaningful to people and we do our outdoor worship services." -Stephanie*

*"Being made in the image of God we were the peak of creation, we're to use the earth, we're to drink the water, we're to eat the animals and eat the plants. We can mine the gold, we can do all of these things, that is a part of subduing it. We can build a dam, but I think we also have a responsibility to make sure that we are causing no harm to things also." -Sean*

Expertise and Knowledge- 22: This code was utilized to acknowledge the need for experts in an area or already having them available. It also included references to a lack of knowledge in an area.

*"At that time, we had some members who understood that whole concept of xeriscaping [xeriscaping] a whole lot better than most of us did and it was well-supported." -David*

*"He definitely brought the expertise in, kind of, the way in which – even now, I'm talking is very influenced by him. What we knew we wanted is more community. We wanted people to interact more. That it was very much – this campus was designed prior and was developed in such a way that was saying, "Come to the service and leave. Come to the service and leave." So, we knew we wanted to create more community interaction. We knew we wanted to leverage the property that we had already – the land that we had had in the midst of this. So, he did bring a dynamic of outdoor-indoor dynamics, getting us thinking more in a planning way." -Scott*

*"I'm also pretty clear. I don't talk about things that I don't know anything about."*

*-Andrew*

*"So, which should make us more in tune to what scientists are saying, but all those things become very hard when you're not the one with the experience and expertise."-Scott*

Fiscal- 63: This code was used to denote any references to financial issues or concerns.

*"I think that they are frugal, which I think is also that this church is actually a very generous church in many ways, but I think there's that underlying sort of mentality of being frugal, spending wisely, not investing in things that aren't going to – they're not going to put a lot of money towards something without sustainability and positive outcomes" -Stephanie*

*"A good portion of the property is weed-covered and neglected, and that's not what we really want. It's just what has been because morale got so low, and financial resources got so tight." -Wendy*

*"The budget determines who wins." -Eddie*

*"Maybe that's part of the problem sometimes with the psyche of the basic parishioners. They're often not interested in volunteering for anything. Though if*

*someone comes and speaks about a mission and sells something, the missionaries walk away with tons of money. I mean, they're very generous here. But if I say let's paint somebody's house, oh, can't do it, you know."* -Mark

Landscape- 204: This code was used in references made about the physical setting of the church property and/or surrounding areas. This was different from the broader code of "environment" but was considered a sub-code to it. It was used to differentiate between the macro-perspective of the code "environment" to a more micro perspective.

*"We were talking about, "How do you make it beautiful and peaceful and a place where somebody might want to go to just sit and reflect or whatever and be maintainable for the long-term?" And, that's where we're struggling with that right now, is how to balance those needs."* -Stephanie

*"I would put in more green – more green spaces, I would probably change from desert landscaping to palm trees. I would actually change the whole thing and take our pine trees out and put in palm trees. We don't have a lot that we can do because our developed space is mostly just the desert wash and then we have the two strips on the road ways, the easements. So, we're limited to how much we actually can do."* -Sean

*"This campus was neglected for years and years and years. I mean, you walk around and you can see the weeds and the – So much of it was just – it reflected their morale, I think, their spirit."* -Wendy

*"You see the new trees, all these trees in the parking lot, we put in about, oh, goodness, seven years ago now. Maybe six. And we had – when the church was built, those were all olive trees out there and then for some reason the pastor turned off all the water and killed them. So we added these now. These are called Live Oaks and once they get big, they're good shade trees."* -Mark

Politics- 28: This code was used to notate any references to politics, including liberalism, conservatism, and how that impacts a perspective or action.

*"Yeah, I mean you know and I just scratched my head. "Oh, the environment really? Do we have to go there?" because it just so politically tinged the issue and, as a result, nobody really hears the good stuff, the common sense stuff, and the stuff people want to or the people that actually do embrace it are just shouting over each other. So, he just cut through that and said, "We can talk." -David*

*"I mean that environmental activists or policy folks could very easily make their case to even the politically most conservative evangelical folks and win them over like that [snaps fingers]. But the way in which the argument is made can be a little alienating sometimes. So, if it's an appeal to the flourishing of your common neighbor, it's much more effective than you have to – than we gotta do this or else the world's gonna be destroyed. I think appealing to specific human stories of suffering, and then also emitting a tone of condescension. " -Eddie*

*"I would say one of the biggest problems that we face in community, at large, is just the level of polarizations happening in our culture and the level of polarization as it applies to– I'll call it, 'politicization'. But, basically, everything feels like there's some substantial issues that to us, as a community, at large, become politicized, and therefore, in our season, very polarized. So, you can't talk about major issues, whether they be immigration, whether they be education – any type of thing you want to put reform to ends up getting pushed into a right-left spectrum, and if you identify with right, or you identify with left, then it's very hard to have communication through it." -Scott*

*"Right now environmentalism has become almost a religion, and that is a shame because that discourages me from speaking and using whatever influence I may have to try to promote a better stewardship of the environment." -Robert*

Poverty- 49: This code was used to denote any references to having a low income and/or lack of sufficient resources.

*"The poverty in the Phoenix area is egregious." -Sean*

*"The wider community needs would be homelessness, poverty, and honestly, just the breakdown of the American family." -Will*

*"The most important thing is listen, to attend to them. And that's very hard to do when we're busy running in circles. Trying to make decent references to the community resources that we know of. We keep them at the door and try to re-train our volunteers at the door to handle them with dignity, and wealth. And we try to make some resources available." -Tim*

*"Our service to the poor and to the homeless obviously there is a big network there that we connect with in terms of the outside community, the city, city services, other private organizations that serve a similar population, try to coordinate services so we're not duplicating them." -David*

Race and Nationality- 26: This code was utilized to notate any issues and/or concerns relating to racial and/or national origin. It was most frequently used when specific references were made to race and/or nationality and may have overlapped with the code "cultural issues" depending on the specific use.

*"Attend to the community on national and international issues that face us, like, for instance global migration because people – so many people wandering across the border are part of this huge crowd that's wandering across the borders of the undeveloped world." -Tim*

*"I think the immigration issue for the Phoenix area is a big, big issue. I'm not so sure that as a church we're doing enough to help with that situation. Even taking in, programs for refugees from Iran, Iraq, or Syria, the Middle East in general, but we have protests and prayers set up in front of every abortion clinic in the area, which is*

*not bad, but it shows in my mind that we are looking more at care for the unborn before we care for the people who are born. You know? That should be equalized a bit more.” -Mark*

*“We’ve been pretty vocal about refugee policy and anti-immigration policy that’s sitting there more in defense of, kind of, our neighbors who, now, are immigrants and are refugees, but it’s challenging because no policy issue, whatever that may be, is, holistically, agreed upon in your congregation.” -Scott*

*“We have problems with the inherent racism that comes with the immigration questions about how do we welcome and incorporate new people into the community. Who? Where are we gonna allow them to come from? All of that.” -Andrew*

Responsibility- 175: This was used to notate references to having a sense of duty or obligation towards something and/or someone.

*“We would say we not only have a natural duty or obligation, we have a moral responsibility, which means if we fail to fulfill that moral responsibility, we’re culpable for the damage that we’ve done and there ultimately is some form of justice that we’re going to have to be held accountable to.” -David*

*“We have a responsibility towards the rest of creation, not because they’re on the same platform or level as us, but because we have a moral obligation – a duty we would call it – towards them to care.” -David*

*“God created everything, visible and invisible, no matter what it is, and because of that design into which we see ourselves placed, before God we have a responsibility if not a commandment, a necessity, to respect what is created, how it's been created, and in what order.” -Mark*

*“One of the problems I see is in Fountain Hills people, and in many other areas where there’s more affluence, is we try to cloister ourselves off from the big needs.*



*And if we just don't look at the big needs then they're also not a problem to us, because we've abdicated our responsibility for them." -Sean*

*"Given our place as those who are created in the image of God – those who God created down in the dirt – were put here with a great responsibility. It can be used for good, or for ill."-Will*

Safety- 27: This code was used to denote references to issues and/or concerns for having and/or being a secure place.

*"We can have a safe place for people to come and experience God and experience joy of being together." -Wendy*

*"We want it to be neat and clean, inviting, safe."-Mark*

*"Another problem that we do have is with the vandalism, and especially when the field was – not when the field's there now, when the trees were up there, we would have people that would go back there and they would, they would do drugs, and then they would go over to the elementary school, and so we had to work really hard to – because the principal over there would find needles and, and stuff like that, and so by taking all the trees down, we helped get – we knew we had homeless people living over there, and they had started a fire at one point, and so we had to, to get all – but with that, then they would go shoot out all of the lights along that end of the parking lot, so it would make it darker in the field so people couldn't see what they were doing." -Liz*

Stewardship- 160: This code was used to acknowledge a responsibility for the environment. This frequently could overlap with the code "responsibility" but was used specifically when referencing the environment, landscape, or natural resources.

*"Well, certainly stewardship. Taking care, to work it and to take care of it, implies a stewardship. In other words, that God has given us creation. In fact, one of our prefaces or Eucharistic prayers mentions that God has created us and put us as*

*master of everything to rule in his name, to take care of all the things that God has created, and I think that's the perspective that goes right back to the Encyclical from Pope Francis, you know, that we really need to look hard at the way we're taking care of the world. It's our responsibility." -Mark*

*"I don't think there's even anything biblical that would justify humanity's sovereignty over God's creation. We can use language like "rule over" but that implies a stewardship role, a servanthood role, a nurturing role, rather than absolute control." -Mark*

*"We're to be good stewards of all that God has created and care for them, plants and animals alike." -Wendy*

*"We have dominion authority to rule over the rest of Creation, for the sake of preservation of God's incredibly gorgeous creation, rather than to work against it, to harm it. So, it doesn't mean we can do – to rule over the birds there, and the fish in the sea, and all that – doesn't mean that we can do whatever we want; but, we're put in this position of authority to care for, and tend for God's creation, just as He would, which always means preservation, and not denigration of Creation." -Will*

*"Part of the vocation of human beings is to be good stewards of the natural resources of the planet. So, they're meant for our well-being, but there's a line we have to be careful not to cross, which I would say exploitation or destruction of the environment for own self-centered purposes." -David*

*"We actually should be more responsible for it because we're the only ones who can actually save it." -Ryan*

*"Yes, of course, one of our biggest sins as Christianity is that we overlooked our responsibility for the environment." -Ryan*

*"I would say water stewardship is a big factor, especially as it connects to – I think it's like nobody ever brings it up as an issue of public policy when they're running for*

*governor or something, but I think it's a very important thing in our state because we live in a desert. Just because we have good water rights agreements doesn't mean that we should just use as much as we want. And we really don't have much of a consciousness of the stewardship in the common – we don't have any restrictions on watering your grass, on any of those sorts of things. So, I think water stewardship – I mean grey water is not even in the vernacular of a lot of people. I just don't even think it's on the radar of the quintessential desert city.” -Eddie*

Subdue and Dominion- 43: This code was utilized in references to the concepts of dominion, control, and/or subduing the earth/land/creation/environment. This code was almost exclusively used in a negative context.

*“When it says to subdue it does not mean to clear cut it and destroy the earth and rape the land. That was never meant to be, to subdue the earth. It is to take an active role in caring for the earth.” -Sean*

*“Rule over” doesn't mean dominate. It means “care for.” Look for a larger picture than just ourselves.” -Wendy*

*“This ‘dominion’ interpretation can be represented in some churches’ preaching because we tend to fall and start – instead of reading the Bible, we actually start tweaking the Bible into culture. At the end of the 19th century, the Western culture became the positivist culture, so everything had to be utilized, and we started worshipping – as Western society – technology, progress, and our power to shape the world. That's why we started damming rivers because we needed electricity, and we couldn't care less what toll it takes on the environment. We started dumping trash someplace. We started really believing that we can trample upon the place because we rule, and we believed the peak of it – the Nazis gassing Jewish and Polish people, Russians – that technology gives us the right to be right. So, now, in the 21st*

*century, in postmodern society, we realize that it was a mistake, that technology betrays us.” -Ryan*

*“We can use language like “rule over” but that implies a stewardship role, a servanthood role, a nurturing role, rather than absolute control.” -Mark*

Translation or Misinterpretation- 8: This code was used to acknowledge issues or problems with the translation of certain words from original text and/or context in regards to the current/modern interpretation.

*“It goes back to how you’re gonna translate that word again, written in Hebrew 3,000 plus years ago, and if you’ve ever seen the text without vowels. So, when you’re translating, it’s a lot of fun, and without punctuation. So, the word could be – was it an A, was it an E? But of course even that’s pretty much the King James Version, or the Bible of the 17th Century. So, we’re talking four or 500 years ago, that wouldn’t have had such a loaded connotation.” -David*

*“Now, here’s the thing. A lot of people misinterpret this passage to think that it’s saying something, that humans have the freedom to do whatever they want to the earth. Or that the earth does not have value and that humans can just run over it and destroy it and drill, baby, drill, that sort of thing. But actually the language of subdue and to rule over sounds harsh to the modern mind in context of who we think of as rulers. When you think of rule over and to subdue, you’re thinking of Genghis Khan and Stalin and those sorts of things, and that’s what people take as a reference point, that humans can just run through and do whatever they want.” -Eddie*

Under-utilization and Issues- 156: This code was used to denote any references to issues on the property, within the church, or issues of not fully using the space and/or resources available. This included physical under-utilization but also an under-utilization of people.

*"Having multiple buildings is very confusing to people when they come on campus. So, I would also ask that the landscaping help direct people to the right places. So, it's very invitational, so people understand where to move to help the flow of people go where they need to go for different things." -Stephanie*

*"I always think that the worse thing for a church is to sit idle during the week, so I'm very open to other opportunities." -Sean*

*"Yeah, there always is – there always more we can do and what we'd like to do, but it comes down to manpower and resources." -Sean*

*"But, I would wish more plants around, which do immediately require more investment and water. It's not such a huge investment. So, we would have to have someone who really puts a lot of heart and effort into it. Every new plant requires some care and a little bit of knowledge. Even taking care of cactus turns out to require some knowledge about how to water in order to not make them more soggy and fall over." -Ryan*

*"We did once do cleanup around Lake Pleasant with our teenagers, and they loved it, but the problem is I just don't get people who are – that's my big pain, that we here have no people who are enthusiastic enough to take teenagers to all those initiatives. Our teenagers are very enthusiastic about animals, about cleaning the environment. I just don't have adults who are equally enthusiastic on a regular, consistent, sustained basis." -Ryan*

Values- 184: This code was used to notate references to things/concepts/ideas that the church community holds significant and/or meaningful. This was used to acknowledge concepts and/or actions that were of great importance to the community.

*"I think the members that care for it do the best they can, and I think that that is a value at the church, that you do the best you can with what you have. And, I think that they do." -Stephanie*

*"One of the values of being created in the image of God is to work. Work is the value of our identity, and he put him in the garden to take care of it and part of it was he was to have authority over all of creation. And, I believe that as Christians, we should be the greatest conservationists to protect and maintain and be caring for our world. And, I think this verse shows that God put him in the garden and he says, you know what, you're in charge of this. I want to see how you're going to take responsibility for this and oversee it. And, manage it and make sure it is how you want it to be. So, I think Adam had the identity of being able to put his fingerprint on it and not just watching creation take off, but also, he was able to use what God had provided in creation and manicure it. It's just like a tree, God makes the tree grow, but we can manicure it to make it a thing of beauty for us." -Sean*

*"Yeah, it's an integral part of who we are, how God has created us. It's not just about the way we treat human beings – that's primary – but the way we treat the rest of the created world has tremendous moral implications for who we are as a people, for our goodness, as well as for our future."-David*

Water- 60: This code was used to notate references to water and was used most frequently in reference to the availability of water for use in landscaping and/or human consumption.

*"Now, in the middle of this context in the desert, we use too much water, and Phoenix is an incredible waste with Colorado Rivers disappearing, we're beginning a water problem here that will be passed to our children and grandchildren. We've wasted it, and we have to take responsibility for that and change it." -Tim*

*"There were some really good, legitimate concerns brought up about how do we do this responsibly without taxing additional water? And, so, we had that conversation and I think that this feeds that, this Genesis, talking about good stewardship of our resources, particularly in creation." -Stephanie*

*"I think right now we're not seeing it, but I look at the size of Phoenix, and the water systems around it and the drought around us in California. I think that ecologically it's going to be the biggest issue to look at. So crafting ways of saving water and reusing water. I think is going to be a brand new thing, and I think the church can help with that. I think we can assist." -Tim*

*"Several years ago – ten at least – we redid all our landscaping to xeriscape [xeriscape], which meant we took out a lot of grass and things like that, put in more desert appropriate foliage, trees, shrubbery, cactus, that sort of thing. So, after we did all that, we reduced our water consumption on the property, these ten acres, by 35 percent." -David*

*"I would say water stewardship is a big factor, especially as it connects to – I think it's like nobody ever brings it up as an issue of public policy when they're running for governor or something, but I think it's a very important thing in our state because we live in a desert. Just because we have good water rights agreements doesn't mean that we should just use as much as we want. And we really don't have much of a consciousness of the stewardship in the common – we don't have any restrictions on watering your grass, on any of those sorts of things. So, I think water stewardship – I mean grey water is not even in the vernacular of a lot of people. I just don't even think it's on the radar of the quintessential desert city. That's one."*

*-Eddie*

## Themes

The coded segments were then reviewed for any commonalities and consistency. From here, a set of individual themes were developed that linked the coded segments. A total of five themes emerged from the analysis: Concern for Others, Responsibility, Environment, Values, and Needs. Each of these themes is its own individual entity, but they all also overlap and connect to each other. The following is a description of each theme and their codes.

**Concern for Others.** The theme of Concern for Others stemmed from the codes of poverty, education, cultural issues, politics, safety, and race/nationality concerns. At the core of each of these codes is a concern for the wellbeing and/or improvement of other people. Also occurring was a desire for society and various nations to have positive outlooks and opportunities. This may be seen as a desire for politics to become more civilized and open to understanding the needs of other viewpoints for example. This was not an unexpected theme, as most religious traditions are generally perceived to be concerned with the wellbeing of others, at least to some extent. This theme is very strongly connected to the themes of Responsibility, Environment, and Values.

**Responsibility.** The theme of Responsibility includes both the codes of responsibility and stewardship. This theme is an indication of faith-based organizations having a sense of obligation over their own actions and behaviors, but also an obligation towards the other people and elements of creation, i.e. the environment. It was not perceived in a negative manner, as something the participants did not want to be involved with, but rather was seen as a great opportunity to share the significance of their faith to the greater world. This theme is connected to the themes of Environment, Values, Needs, and as previously mentioned, Concern for Others.



**Environment.** The theme of Environment was also not unexpected, and consists of the codes landscape, water, and beauty. This theme links together the various concepts of creation that are significant to faith-based organizations. This theme is related to Values, Concern for Others, and Responsibility.

**Values.** The theme of Values is somewhat less obvious from the initial analysis, but consists of the codes activities, concerns of religion/faith, subdue/dominion, and translation/misinterpretation. This theme links together the various concepts of what is important to members of faith-based organizations. So the things they do, their perspective of the Biblical verses of subduing and dominating the earth and how those verses are translated to members and the greater world as edicts, are all aspects that are of great significance to members. This theme is highly connected to Concern for Others and Responsibility, but also to the theme of Environment.

**Needs.** The theme of Needs is also an unexpected result and includes the codes of under-utilization or issues, fiscal, and expertise/knowledge. To a certain extent, these are all concepts where participants acknowledged problems or areas where they were reliant upon others outside their organizations for assistance or guidance. By assessing these supposed “weaknesses” however, it was possible to understand the connection between them, as well as to the other themes of the study. This theme is related to Responsibility and Values.

As briefly mentioned, each of these themes is connected to other themes within the study and form higher level concepts that are drivers of the organizations and their perspectives. Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the overlap between the themes. One of the clearest examples of this is how the overlap of Values and Responsibility with Environment produce the notion of environmental stewardship. Environmental stewardship is at the heart, a manifestation of the

general ideas of values, ethics, obligation, and concern for the Earth. Another example is the relationship between Responsibility, Values, and Concern for Others. Having a concern for the wellbeing of other people would be seen as an ethical position for most faith-based traditions and they would have a sense of duty to carry out that concern in tangible ways. An example of this can be seen in food drives and volunteering after disasters such as hurricanes or tornadoes. While it could be argued that this is a basic human desire, from the interviews, it is apparent that faith-based organizations hold this type of activity in extremely high regard.

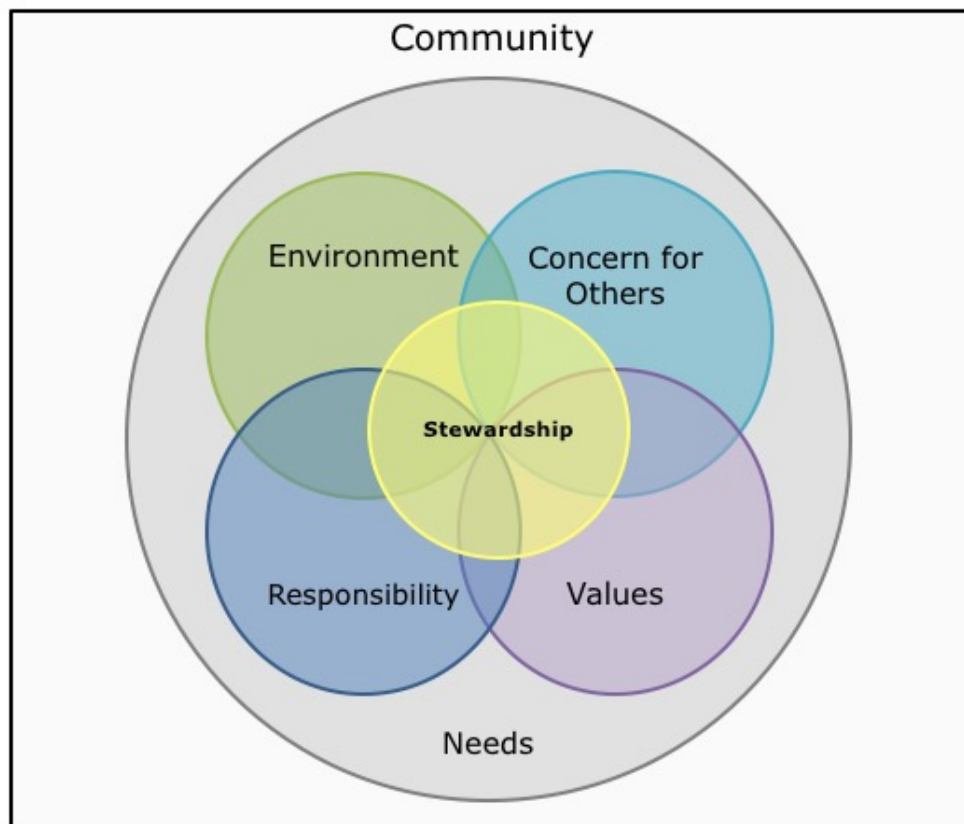


Figure 1. Overlap of Themes

Ultimately, these connections form a higher-level determinant and that is the concept of community. This is ultimately the most significant concept that links every theme and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of the interview data indicated a number of concepts that are of importance for the clergy members in this study. While a number of various issues and concerns were raised by many of the participants, several commonalities were identified. The results indicated a total of six themes, five of which are interconnected. Concern for Others, Values, Responsibility, Environment, and Stewardship, along with the final theme of Needs, build the foundation of the overarching notion of community. The significance of these themes, the needs of the organizations, and how to move forward with these results are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

The current research study had several questions it sought to increase understanding towards. First, what values and beliefs do clergy hold in relation to environmental problems and stewardship? This question was based primarily in the White Hypothesis (1967) and sought to understand better what clergy members actual perspectives are regarding the environment. A second research question was if clergy see a role for the church in working to alleviate environmental problems, or to promote environmental stewardship and what they feel their role may be? This question also linked to the White (1967) paper. Finally, this research sought to understand what barriers exist or are perceived to exist that prevent faith-based organizations from greater involvement in their communities and particularly in environmental initiatives.

The analysis of the clergy interviews resulted in several themes (Environment, Concern for Others, Values, Responsibility, Stewardship, and Needs) that all fell under the greater concept of Community. The themes clearly indicate that the leaders of faith-based organizations are interested and vested in both their immediate and surrounding communities. This includes being involved in activities and initiatives that would benefit the environment. What the Needs theme indicates however is that in order to achieve their other goals and focus on those other aspects of community that matter to them, certain resources are required that can impact the success rate of the other activities. Their needs can impact every undertaking the organizations may wish to participate in or initiate. One component of this is their involvement and understanding of environmental activities. By assessing what is important to the leaders of faith-based organizations, it can be

concluded that Christian groups are not opposed to environmentalism, but rather that they lack the sufficient resources and knowledge to fully participate.

The results of the analysis provide perspective on several different but related concepts. First, the White Hypothesis that was originally presented in 1967 and stated that because members of the Christian religious tradition were inherently anthropocentric, they were in opposition to environmentalism does not hold true with the sampled group of clergy. Regarding discussions of their respective religious traditions, none of the research participants expressed a perspective that was in opposition to the environment. Further, all but one presented that Christianity actually requires adherents to be protective of the environment as it is part of God's creation, which renders it worthy.

Second, community is a foundational component to faith-based organizations and included both the members of the organizations themselves, but also the community at large. While not unexpected, a desire to improve and support the wellbeing of others was important to the study participants and was something that carried over into many of their activities.

A third component, and one highly connected to the first, is that the sampled clergy members are concerned for the environment. Every participant noted that the environment is worthy of protection and/or conservation. What was not universal however, is the role humans played in the current state of the environment, and more so, what role humans can/will play in the future regarding climate change.

Finally, this research study made it apparent that while the leaders of faith-based organizations are by and large willing and open to greater action to benefit the environment, they cannot do it alone and need assistance from subject matter experts, such as landscape architects, in order to really become involved.

## **Discussion**

**The White Hypothesis.** As previously discussed, in 1967, White's article accusing the Judeo-Christian belief system as the origin of the ecological crisis facing the earth was published. The core argument of the article was that the Judeo-Christian perspective of the world is one in which humans are dominant over nature and (primarily Western) Christianity in particular is inherently anthropocentric and therefore, anti-environment. Since then, multiple studies have been published attempting to either confirm or refute the White Hypothesis, but with significantly mixed results. The past research was frequently conducted on data gathered for different research intentions and then used after the fact to make determinations about the environmental perspectives of Christians. Little to no research exists that was done intentionally with experts in the field of Christianity, the clergy. This research study addresses that void and provides a greater depth of understanding than previous research studies.

First, analysis of the data from the current study found no support for an anti-environmental perspective as the White Hypothesis would indicate. This is in line with the past research conducted by Boyd (1999), Greeley (1993), Wolkomir, Futreal, Woodrum and Hoban (1997a) and Woodrum and Hoban (1994) who did not find support for the anti-environmental sentiment proposed by White. While the sample size was relatively small, none of the participants expressed that the Christian belief system was in any way opposed to the environment or the protection/conservation/preservation of the environment. Quite the opposite was true actually. All the clergy members who participated repeatedly acknowledged that taking care of the environment was a basic principle of the faith.

The concept of stewardship was mentioned by the participants in every interview and was noted as being the best way to describe the preferred relationship

between humans and the environment. Frequently, participants noted that the earth is part of God's creation and as such, is important and worthy of being preserved. Beyond that, participants repeatedly stated that humans actually have an obligation to take care of the environment. One pastor stated that "We not only have a natural duty or obligation, we have a moral responsibility, which means if we fail to fulfill that moral responsibility, we're culpable for the damage that we've done and there ultimately is some form of justice that we're going to have to be held accountable to. So, to ignore it would be to ignore a fundamental part of the way we see the world and how we're supposed to treat it." While another pastor noted "We have a God-given mandate to care for the environment, to be stewards of the environment. It also says that the environment is not God, but it's a gift from God to be cared for. And to the degree that you don't, it's sin.". Statements such as these were common throughout the interviews and directly refute the White Hypothesis that Christians are anti-environment and it is worth noting that one hundred percent of the clergy members interviewed stated it is a fundamental aspect of Christianity that humans are intended to take care of the environment, even if they did not all go as far as to say that not doing so was a sin.

Based on the results of the current research, one aspect of the White Hypothesis was found to be partially accurate however and that is, generally, Christians can be considered to be more focused on humans than other forms of life or elements of the environment. This is less in line with a direct anti-environmental perspective though and more akin to the findings of Schultz et al., (2000) that found that "... it is not the case that people with a literal belief in the Bible are unconcerned about environmental degradation but instead that their concerns are rooted in the effects that this degradation will have for humans" (p. 588). The current research provides support for this sentiment. As one pastor stated, "So, it's really dangerous

to try to raise them [plants and animals] to a higher moral status because then one, it knocks human beings off the pedestal and once you start to treat everything the same, on the same moral level, then you're just gonna have chaos and, the truth of the matter is, if we're gonna be faithful to being stewards of the environment and caring for the fish and the animals and the plants, as Genesis says, if I'm equal to some flora or fauna or chimpanzee, who's gonna do that?". Another pastor noted that:

When it says to subdue it does not mean to clear cut it and destroy the earth and rape the land. That was never meant to be, to subdue the earth. It is to take an active role in caring for the earth. Use the resources of it, that's what the earth was created for. I believe, that being made in the image of God we were the peak of creation, we're to use the earth, we're to drink the water, we're to eat the animals and eat the plants. We can mine the gold, we can do all of these things, that is a part of subduing it. We can build a dam, but I think we also have a responsibility to make sure that we are causing no harm to things also.

These statements are very much in line with the notion that Christians are anthropocentric (as White posited), but not necessarily anti-environment. As such, an additional conclusion regarding the White Hypothesis can be drawn, and that is that being anthropocentric does not also necessitate one being anti-environment.

That people, or groups of people, can have a focus on the welfare of people while still being supportive of environmentalism runs counter to the White Hypothesis, but that is the general position that Christian clergy members overwhelmingly held. The crux of the argument that many of the clergy members made was that it is not possible to be concerned about other people (the pinnacle of God's creation) without also being concerned about the rest of creation. As one pastor noted "It's an integral part of who we are, how God has created us. It's not just about the way we treat human beings – that's primary – but the way we treat the rest of the created world has tremendous moral implications for who we are as a people, for our goodness, as well as for our future.". More directly, another pastor



stated, "Knowing that our neighbors are breathing air, drinking water, eating food exposed to whatever's in the air, we cannot love our neighbors without having concern for the environment because their life and their flourishing is dependent on that.". Statements such as these make the Christian perspective clear and it was apparent throughout the interviews that the perspective of the clergy members is that it is not possible to be adherent to their faith and not also be concerned about the wellbeing of the environment. This connects strongly to the concepts of community and concern for others that were so common throughout the interviews. This is quite significant as this finding provides a clear way to help bring Christian faith-based organizations together with environmental organizations: concern for the impacts on people, or to put another way, concern for the impacts to the community.

**Community Matters.** As the discussion of the White Hypothesis noted, the welfare of other people is a primary focus and concern of the clergy members in this research study. They are not only concerned about their church specific community, but also the greater community at large. This includes the physical neighborhood surrounding the church itself, where the members live, but also the towns, cities, and countries in which people live. As such, while this will include concern for neighbors who do not have enough food to eat or money for housing as typically considered for such organizations, it also includes whether there is clean water to drink and safe streets for people to walk along. Because of this concern for both the community and it's residents, members of faith-based organizations such as churches are prime candidates for community involvement.

Importantly, the leaders of these organizations, the clergy, are aware that involvement and participation in community initiatives is an important facet of their faith. When asked if they desired more involvement in their communities, every pastor but one stated they did. Further, when the specific question was asked if they

would be willing to work and partner with an environmental organization, a full one hundred percent indicated they would be willing and, that they believed their members would be as well. There was a caveat to the willingness to work with other organizations that must be acknowledged however. Several of the participants noted that they would need to check the mission and background of the partnering or cooperating organization before they would be willing to mention it to their members. This is important as it links to one of the prime reasons the clergy expressed members may be hesitant: politics.

At some point or another within the interviews, every participant made a reference to politics in some form. It was not mentioned very frequently (only 28 instances were coded) but it was noted as a concern. One pastor put it clearly when they stated "Unfortunately, one of the things that happens in our culture is everything, everything is politicized. So, everything is seen through the lens of politics. You're either left or right, conservative or liberal type thing, which is the wrong way to see all this stuff." The concept of environmentalism was mentioned by many of the participants as being an issue that is perceived by many as political, and therefore, a topic they were hesitant to directly broach with their members. One pastor stated that "Right now environmentalism has become almost a religion, and that is a shame because that discourages me from speaking and using whatever influence I may have to try to promote a better stewardship of the environment." This individual acknowledged they possess they ability to promote stewardship, but because of the politicalized nature, would not. Interestingly, despite being hesitant about how some of their members may perceive the topic, there was only one clergy member who acknowledged a refusal to discuss the topic with their members, with the others stating that they either were willing, or actively trying, but noting they were doing so carefully if they were more concerned. Several clergy members even

stated that the topics of stewardship and the environment are causes their organizations actively engage with and on the topic of some members possibly being opposed, these individuals merely acknowledged they cannot please everyone. A significant finding of this concern of politicization is that because of the perception of stewardship and the environment being political, who shares the information with the faith-based organizations becomes critical.

**Role of Landscape Architects.** The significance of who shares the message of environmentalism with faith-based organizations is a significant finding of this study. A common sentiment that many of the participants shared was that while they believe that stewardship of the environment is critical, they themselves do not possess the correct knowledge to fully carry the message. As one stated, "I don't talk about things that I don't know anything about. I know what I like when I see it and I know how to nurture trees and grow them, but I don't know a lot about landscape design.". Another noted an awareness of things, "... which should make us more in tune to what scientists are saying, but all those things become very hard when you're not the one with the experience and expertise.". Several participants noted that changes had been made to the church property because members were landscape architects or master gardeners who brought attention to the issues and then helped guide the process. Another pastor acknowledged one of their issues "... education is, the biggest one, and that goes back to finding ways to get people into the door to have that information," because they do not independently have the necessary knowledge. This is a role landscape architects and planners, as well as other environmental professionals, are highly suited for several reasons.

First, landscape architects possess the necessary knowledge regarding the environment. They have knowledge of plants and landscape design to assist faith-based organizations with issues on their property that the organizations frequently

discussed. Additionally, landscape architects also possess knowledge about broader environmental and sustainability issues. Landscape architects certainly also have sufficient knowledge to discuss the issue of climate change as well, which is an area where faith-based organizations frequently are not overly familiar. By having the appropriate knowledge, landscape architects would be ideally suited to assist faith-based organizations with educational efforts regarding the environment.

Second, landscape architects frequently are employed in the private sector and do not have any political association to them, particularly in the way government employees may. As such, they are able to avoid the political connotations that were previously discussed and would not be perceived in the same suspicious manner as other professionals. This would allow the landscape architect to more readily be accepted by the organization without, or with less, concern of ulterior motives that may come from government employees or academics (other professions that generally hold the necessary knowledge on the subject). While conducting the research, several of the participants acknowledged they only agreed to participate to determine what the research "angle" was and the real motivation for the study. Further, other participants acknowledged that many clergy members are suspicious of the motives of academics. This perspective could also explain the lack of research conducted with clergy members previously. This perceived bias or suspicion is only eliminated if the individual is already a member of the faith-based organization. By already being an insider to the organization, the information they share will be more readily accepted. Landscape architects in particular would be well suited to share their knowledge with faith-based organizations though because they do not have the same connotations attached to them.

Finally, landscape architects in particular need to improve their outreach to the greater population. While the general population has a fairly solid understanding

of what architects do, there is less understanding of landscape architects. Those people that do know however, realize the depth and breadth of knowledge that landscape architects possess. Educational outreach to communities, beginning with faith-based organizations, would be a beneficial technique to increase understanding of the profession and the issues that are important to the field. Education of both clergy and members of faith-based organizations is essential to help increase pro-environmental activities and initiatives. Considering that landscape architects and planners have this required knowledge, they would be ideal to help promote education in the area.

While this research was able to identify that faith-based organizations are in fact willing and interested in participating in environmental education and initiatives, and that landscape architects are the ideal group to lead such efforts, it also helped bring to light how best to go about this endeavor. Before discussing those methods however, it is essential to acknowledge a basic requirement. It is imperative that a relationship be formed in advance in order to be effective in working with faith-based organizations (or any other collaborative endeavors with different groups). This trust needs to be built with an open understanding that one group does not have ulterior motives in convincing the other to change their perspective or beliefs. The basis of the relationship needs to be rooted in a shared interest in benefiting or improving the community. If there is doubt of the motivation of the individual or group representing the environmental side of the endeavor, the members of the faith-based organization will not be receptive. The motivations of everyone involved need to be clear from the start and communication is necessary to sustain the relationship. As such, discussions of religion or politics would need to be avoided in favor of discussions of facts and action. Presuming this open dialogue can be established, the relationship between the faith-based organization and environmental

groups or representatives (such as landscape architects) will be possible and benefit everyone involved. Several possible methods for establishing a collaborative relationship exist.

The easiest way would be if a landscape architect was themselves affiliated with the faith-based organization from the start. If this would be the case, the relationship and trust would already exist, paving the way for the member to bring up the possibility of educational opportunities and activities with the leaders and other members. This was mentioned on several occasions from participants in the research; they had existing members who were landscape architects who brought to the attention of the leaders concerns with the landscape of the property for example. In one instance in particular, the member not only assisted the church in converting their existing grass into a desert-friendly xeriscape design, but also helped coordinate a grant to help cover the expenses. This led to a community award for the church, and a significant number of members converting their yards at home. This is a perfect example of the possible influence a faith-based organization can have on their community.

Not every faith-based organization is going to have members that are a landscape architect however, and not every landscape architect is going to be a member of such an organization. This does not in any way prohibit the two from working together. Landscape architects are still able to approach the organizations and offer educational opportunities and assistance. Two possible methods for this have been identified. The first would be if the landscape architect were to reside or work in the surrounding community of the church. This would give a reasonable connection from which to begin a relationship. The other possible option would be if the faith-based organizations had a way to contact landscape architects that would be interested in collaborating with them on education or activities.

Currently, there is no real way for a faith-based organization to locate a landscape architect who may have such an interest. While they can certainly check with the local chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) for contact information, there is no way for them to know if those individuals would have interest in assisting faith-based organizations. Additionally, as funding is frequently limited for such groups, it would be beneficial if the landscape architects were willing to donate their time and do the work pro bono. While not every landscape architect would have the desire to do so, if participating in such an endeavor would count towards continuing education credits for their ASLA membership, that may certainly increase interest. An added bonus of this system would be that more community members would learn about the profession of landscape architecture and the role landscape architects play in shaping communities and the world at large. This would certainly be a case of a win-win situation.

### **Impacts for Environmental Professionals**

While briefly noted above, increasing the involvement between faith-based organizations and landscape architects and other environmental professionals, would also have benefits for landscape architects. As previously acknowledged, this relationship would increase the understanding of what landscape architects do, as well as the understanding of the importance of stewardship of the environment. Past the usual awareness of recycling and reducing water consumption, many people outside the environmental professions have a solid knowledge base of environmental stewardship and could greatly benefit from exposure to this knowledge. Further, while many people are interested on a more superficial level of what landscape architects do, there is very limited understanding beyond that. If more people had this knowledge, there would certainly be more support for causes of importance to the profession, as well as likely, more interest in people joining the field. While the

need for landscape architects continues to grow, the number of landscape architects working is remaining relatively constant. Finally, more understanding of the importance of stewardship and the role landscape architects play would likely lead to an increase in the need for their services, increasing employment opportunities. Employment for landscape architects and other environmental professionals is linked to the economy doing well and economic downturns frequently result in increased unemployment, despite the need for their skills and knowledge persisting. An increased understanding could diminish the perception of environmental professionals as being non-essential.

### **Significance**

This research concluded that Christian clergy, when asked as representatives of their particular denomination, do not possess an anti-environmental perspective as the White Hypothesis had otherwise indicated. Further, the concept of stewardship is actually quite an important principle of their faith. As the environment and all its inhabitants were created by God, they all belong to him, not humans, and therefore are worthy of preservation. Additionally, while they generally do possess a human-centered focus that sees people as the pinnacle of creation, that placement is actually one of responsibility and not control. The Christian worldview is one where humans are tasked with being caretakers for the environment, and ultimately, will be held accountable for their actions. Despite this perspective, a preconceived notion exists that Christians are not willing to support or participate in environmentally oriented education and activities. This likely stems from the White paper in 1967 that initiated the religion verses the environment debate and which specifically called out Christians for their responsibility for the environmental crisis. From that point, the concept gained traction despite there being little genuine evidence to support it. What has historically been overlooked in the discussion and the White Hypothesis is



how White concluded his article and this holds significance today and for the current research in particular.

In the final paragraph of his seminal article, White stated that "... since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not," (p. 1207, 1967). While White stated that the Christian worldview led to the destruction of the environment, he concluded that a religious perspective was going to be necessary to preserve the environment. This view was shared with a number of the clergy members who participated in the research. For example, one noted that "... the churches and synagogues, mosques, can be drivers of the community. So, they're a good way for some of these issues to gain greater support together and help a whole community deal with an issue together and some of us lead the way. So, just because we have access to so many people instantly and when it gels with who we are, which I think you'll see that across the board, then we can work together," while another, specifically referencing water, said "I think that ecologically it's going to be the biggest issue to look at. So crafting ways of saving water and reusing water. I think is going to be a brand-new thing, and I think the church can help with that. I think we can assist,". If faith-based organizations are ready to be involved and believe they can help environmental education and initiatives, the environmental community should readily welcome them and encourage their participation.

As discussed previously, faith-based organizations and clergy member hold a significant place in the community and in the values of many people. Every day clergy members speak with and provide guidance to members of their respective communities. They are seen by many as community leaders and they hold a position of influence. The clergy members themselves know this as well. During the interview process approximately half acknowledged the interview process had made them

think through more deeply the message they send to their members on the environment and commented that they will likely incorporate the topic into future sermons more directly. Considering how large many of the faith-based organizations are in terms of attendance, if even a small percentage shifted to a more overtly environmental set of actions and behaviors, the impact could be quite significant. For instance, while many of the churches estimated they have around 200-500 people weekly in attendance on average, several consistently were at 2500-5000 people weekly. Especially in the larger organizations, the possible impact in numbers would be quite significant. An additional 25-50 people in any given community taking a more active role in environmental initiatives could result in noticeable impacts and certainly would be worth the possible time investment from environmental professionals.

### **Conclusion**

As this discussion has noted, not only are clergy members not anti-environmental as White posited, they are actually very concerned with the well-being of the environment. They possess a significant level of concern for their communities and they desire to see them thrive and to have a positively impact on those communities. They cannot do this alone however, and are dependent on others sharing their resources, specifically knowledge, in order for them to make the impact they seek. Landscape architects are in the unique position to be able to assist with sharing knowledge of the environment, which is an area of both particular concern and a lack of sufficient knowledge. These opportunities for collaboration and cooperation would also greatly benefit the profession of landscape architecture as well. By developing and fostering relationships between landscape architects and faith-based organizations, the opportunities for both to flourish are great, and well worth the investment.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Introduction**

The 1967 article from White stating that Christianity was inherently anthropocentric and therefore, anti-environmental, ignited a firestorm of controversy, but limited consensus in the research. The current research was a qualitative study designed to increase understanding of the environmental perspective of clergy members within the Phoenix metropolitan area as well as to partially test the White Hypothesis. Utilizing in-depth interviews, this study noted no support for White's theory, and in fact, found significant support for the environment. Additionally, the study noted several other findings of importance.

First, in addition to not supporting the White Hypothesis, clergy members are very concerned for the well-being of the environment. As something created by God, and belonging to him, people have a clear responsibility to protect and preserve the environment. As such, stewardship is of great importance to them and their belief system.

Second, community is the highest concern of the faith-based organizations included in this study. Christians are concerned about the well-being of not just their church community, but also the greater community at large. They desire to see those communities grow and flourish and want to help provide positive support and impact where they can. They cannot do this without outside help though. Especially where environmental activities and initiatives are concerned, churches need the support of experts in the field. This is where landscape architects in particular can be most beneficial.

Landscape architects possess the correct knowledge of the environment, at all scales, to help educate and assist faith-based organizations. They can help increase

knowledge of plants and design strategies, but also how the communities can integrate with the environment in a more sustainable way. Further, by collaborating with faith-based organizations, landscape architects could increase understanding of the profession, which is something the average person currently does not understand well, if at all. By increasing awareness of the field, and of stewardship of the environment, the population would develop a greater appreciation for the natural environment and the role landscape architects play in helping to shape and preserve it. This would benefit the community and have far reaching ripple effects for everyone involved.

### **Future Research**

While the current study provided beneficial information, additional research is still needed in multiple areas. Some of these such as a larger, more inclusive sample and the inclusion of a quantitative component, would have helped strengthen the current study. First, the research needs to expand to a larger sample of clergy members that would be more representative. This study would need to include more participants including those excluded from the current research. Especially in the Phoenix metro area, the population of Latter-Day Saints is significant and worthy of deeper investigation. Similarly, inclusion of Jewish and Muslim clergy members is also essential. This would provide a greater foundation of knowledge from which to move forward.

Additional research is also needed in a more quantitative format. While the current study was entirely qualitative, this was due to the limited data available. This study would be an excellent source from which to build a quantitative survey as greater clarity on the concepts now exists. This type of research would also make it easier to include more participants providing greater generalization for the broader population of religious adherents. Further, a quantitative study would be more

applicable for increasing the understanding of the non-expert adherents to the various faith-based organizations. In other words, what are the environmental perspectives of the average Christian, Jew, and Muslim? This research is essential and designing a research tool to correctly identify the perspectives of other segments of the population would likely result in more concrete information than previous research was able.

Third, while the current study found no connection between the political beliefs of the participants and their responses, additional research is needed to better understand the possible connection between environmental and political perspectives, especially since this is frequently noted as an influential variable. Further, it would be helpful to understand for the average adherent, if they are more likely to associate with their political or religious perspectives regarding the environment, if they otherwise were in opposition.

Finally, additional research assessing the influence of gender in regard to religion and the environment would be beneficial. While not all faith-based organizations permit women to be members of the clergy, for those that do, it would be interesting to assess if there were any differences in perspectives and acceptance of teaching in regard to environmentalism. In post-interview discussions, several of the women clergy noted both that their perspective of power, authority, and God's commands (as referenced in the interview), were likely different from their male counterparts and that generally churches seek out women clergy when they are looking for a change in their organization. Additional research would be needed to better understand the possible implications of these issues.

## **Conclusion**

As previously discussed, in 1967, White's article accusing the Judeo-Christian belief system as the origin of the ecological crisis facing the earth was published, the

core argument of which was that the Judeo-Christian perspective of the world is one in which humans are dominant over nature and (primarily Western) Christianity in particular is inherently anthropocentric and therefore, anti-environment. Since then, multiple studies have been published attempting to either confirm or refute the White Hypothesis, but with significantly mixed results. One aspect that was lacking in the past research were researchers not going to the experts in the field of Christianity, the members of the clergy. Further, virtually all of the past studies were conducted with data that was gathered for vastly different purposes and was then made to fit the desired goals of the researchers. While this may in many instances be an effective method of assessing the broad perspectives of a large segment of the population in general, it lacks the necessary depth to truly understand the fundamental beliefs of a more specific population.

The current study addressed both of these issues and in seeking out the experts in the field, found no basis for considering Christians to be anti-environment. On the contrary, it found that stewardship of the environment is a fundamental aspect of Christianity. Additionally, it was found that clergy members are deeply concerned in the wellbeing of their communities and desire more involvement with them. They also have a willingness to participate in environmental education and initiatives but are lacking the knowledge to lead those efforts. In this situation, environmental professionals, particularly landscape architects, are ideally suited to help fill this role. If landscape architects were to collaborate with faith-based organizations, the results would be beneficial for the organizations, the profession of landscape architecture, and communities as a whole.

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APPENDIX A  
SAMPLE EMAILS



## First Contact

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Katherine Crewe in the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand theological perspectives in the Phoenix metro area and am seeking your expertise regarding issues significant to your community and activities undertaken to address these issues. Further, I am looking for your expertise to better understand several verses from Scripture, notably Genesis 1:28.

I am recruiting members of the clergy at your church who regularly preach to the congregation to participate in an interview regarding their professional perspectives on various issues of significance to your community. The interview will take approximately one (1) hour. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time. In order to participate, the members must be 18 years or older.

Your responses will be confidential. In order to protect your confidentiality, only the interviewer and principal investigator will have access to any identifying information. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name nor the name of the church will not be used. I would like to audio record the interview. The audio recordings will be deleted upon transcription and any identifiers removed.

I understand you are extremely busy and I am only one of many requests for your time, but your participation would be greatly appreciated. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me.

## Second Contact

I am a PhD student working with Professor Katherine Crewe at Arizona State University and I previously emailed you regarding my research about seeking the perspective of clergy members in Phoenix on issues their communities find significant.

I wanted to follow up on my request to ask if you would be willing to participate in an online survey regarding your professional perspectives on various issues of significance to your community? The survey should take approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. No identifying information will be collected and the survey results will be completely anonymous. The link to the survey can be found here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/85PTM99>

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the study, please contact me.

I greatly appreciate your time.

Thank you,

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I'm looking to get your perspective on the important issues facing your community as well as an understanding of how you use and manage the outdoor areas of property. I'm going to ask you a series of questions and I would like you to respond from the perspective as an official representative of your church. At the same time, I'm seeking your perspective as a leader of (this specific church/name), so please try to respond as a representative of your church.

#### Section 1

1. What do you see as the most pressing issues or problems facing your community?
  - a. What are the most critical issues facing the community here locally or in Phoenix?
  - b. What is your church community doing to address those issues?
2. What do you see as the most pressing issues or problems currently facing society?
  - a. What are the most critical issues facing the world or the United States?
  - b. What is your church community doing to address those issues?

#### Section 2

- 1a. How do you and your church community use the outdoor areas of your church property?
  - a. How is it used on a regular basis (i.e. weekly)?
  - b. How is it used during major holidays like Christmas and Easter?
  - c. Are there seasonal uses?
  - d. How is it used during/for special events?
- 1b. Would you like to use it more often or in different ways than at the present?
2. Do you like/dislike the current landscaping? What do you think your parishioners like or dislike about the landscaping here?
  - a. Amount/type of landscaping
  - b. Trees and plants
  - c. Grass/lawn or desert-like landscaping
  - d. Asphalt/parking areas
3. What do you think are the benefits of your current landscaping?
4. How do you think landscaping reflects your churches values, if at all?
  - a. How so/Why not?
5. If you could change the landscaping, how and why would you do so?

#### Section 3A

1. Could you please explain the meaning of Genesis 2:15 which states:  
<sup>15</sup> "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."
  - 1a. What does this verse mean to you as a X (Lutheran/Catholic/Etc.)?
  - 1b. How does this verse apply to day-to-day life as a X (Lutheran)?
  - 1c. What does this verse mean in terms of religious beliefs about the environment?
2. Could you please explain the meaning of Genesis 1:28, which states:  
<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."
  - 2a. What does this verse mean to you as a X (Lutheran/Catholic/Etc.)?
  - 2b. How does this verse apply to day-to-day life as a X (Lutheran)?

- 2c. What does this verse mean in terms of religious beliefs about the environment?
3. Could you please explain the meaning of Colossians 1: 16-17 which states:  
<sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
- 3a. What does this verse mean to you as a X (Lutheran/Catholic/Etc.)?  
 3b. How does this verse apply to day-to-day life as a X (Lutheran)?  
 3c. What does this verse mean in terms of religious beliefs about the environment?

### Section 3B

Give the survey questions to circle the agree/disagree responses. Then ask the following questions regarding the responses:

1. Why did you agree/disagree to the statement "Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs"?
2. Why did you agree/disagree to the statement "Humans are seriously abusing the environment"?
3. Why did you agree/disagree to the statement "Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist"?
4. Why did you agree/disagree to the statement "Despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature"?
5. Why did you agree/disagree to the statement "Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature"?

### Last

1. What do you see as the most pressing environmental issues or problems facing your community or the Phoenix area here locally?
  - a. What is your church community doing to address those issues?
2. What do you see as the most critical or important environmental issues or problems around the world or nation?
  - a. What is your church community doing to address those issues, if anything?
3. How does the congregation interact with the local community outside of the church?
  - a. Are there any specific events you organize or participate in?
  - b. Why or why not?
  - c. Are there any barriers you feel prevent/limit the interaction between your congregation and the outside community?
  - d. Would you like to have more interaction with the local community?

### Demographical Information

1. How long have you been affiliated with this church?
2. How long has the church been in this location?
  - a. Were there any previous locations in the area?
3. Approximately how many members is your congregation?
4. How would you describe your congregation in terms of socio-economic status?

APPENDIX C  
IRB APPROVAL

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Katherine Crewe  
 Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning, School of  
 480/965-6501  
 kcrewe@asu.edu

Dear Katherine Crewe:

On 2/26/2015 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	The Role of Religion in Phoenix: A Study of Clergy's Perspectives
Investigator:	Katherine Crewe
IRB ID:	STUDY00002129
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debriefing Form Final, Category: Other (to reflect anything not captured above);</li> <li>• Religion in Phoenix Interview Protocol, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Religion in Phoenix Consent Form, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Re Religion in Phoenix.pdf, Category: Other (to reflect anything not captured above);</li> <li>• The Role of Religion in Phoenix: A Study of Clergy's Perspectives Application, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Religion in Phoenix Recruitment Form , Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> </ul>

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 2/26/2015.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,  
 IRB Administrator

cc: Samantha Samples  
 Samantha Samples