

**Host: Robert Frederick**

Whatever you thought about how the March for Science was carried off, or whether you're wondering why *The New York Times* hired a columnist who interprets climate-change data differently than the scientists who created that data, there are a lot of reasons to experiment to figure out better ways to talk about science. That's what we do here on *The Conjectural*, and we invite you to do it, too. The data for our experiment, your feedback to [TheConjectural.com](http://TheConjectural.com).

**Speaker: Katherine Hayhoe**

For long-term sustained action, we need hope, we need love, we need encouragement, we need that sense of shared community — of being in this together — and for many people, again, over 75% of people in the U.S. over 85 worldwide, faith communities often provide exactly that.

**Host: Robert Frederick**

On this episode of *The Conjectural*, leveraging religious support for climate policy and the Paris Climate Agreement.

The White House is having an internal debate about whether to pull out of the Paris Agreement made in December, 2015.

Businesses have written a letter to urge the President to stick with the historic climate agreement — businesses including Apple, BHP Billiton, BP, DuPont, General Mills, Google, Intel, Microsoft, National Grid, Novartis Corporation, PG&E, Prio Tinto, Schnieder Electric, Shell, Unilever, and Walmart.

But faith-based communities have been supporting climate change policy for decades, even though, says climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe of Texas Tech University —

**Speaker: Katherine Hayhoe**

In the United States, climate change has become one of the most politically polarized issues in the entire country — beating out gun control and abortion, and on par with immigration of all things — and at the same time, the best predictor of what we think about a changing climate is not how much we know about the science, it's simply where we fall on the political spectrum.

**Host: Robert Frederick**

So why are religious organizations in support of climate-change legislation, and do you believe that they actually are? Fletcher Harper is an Episcopal priest and the Executive Director of GreenFaith, an organization that describes itself as an “interfaith coalition for the environment” founded in 1992.

**Speaker: Fletcher Harper**

One way to talk about the environment in religious settings that resonates is to recognize it as a gift. Working off of this theme of the natural world as a gift, which evokes a response of gratitude and of responsibility, is one way that we saw religious communities begin to respond to this topic. A second was on the basic theme of moral or ethical responsibility. And that follows naturally from the first assertion that the Earth is a gift. So we've got a gift, we have a responsibility — the third piece, then, after establishing that basic kind of moral framework, is to talk about the fact that things are out of balance. Again, we find that kind of language — that kind of metaphor — is most familiar to people who are practitioners of the dharmic traditions, which [unintelligible], but it also

resonates very consistently through Muslim teachings and writings, and it resonates certainly for Christians and Jews. It also has the advantage of connecting people with their everyday experience: When they realize that it's 50 degrees at 7 o'clock in the morning in Boston in the middle of February, it's not hard for people — regardless of their cultural or political or religious persuasion — to get the sense and to agree with the fact that there is something out of balance. And a fourth theme from communicating about this, which again finds resonance in religious communities, is that it's time to “wake up!” Religious communities and traditions for millennia have used the metaphor of awakening as a way of experiencing or undergoing a kind of enlightenment that's fundamental to changing one's life to live consistent with something that is true and deep and of profound and enduring value. So this idea from gift to responsibility to the recognition of ‘out of balance’ to the importance of ‘waking up,’ that sort of created a broad narrative framework that we found worked very well.



**Host: Robert Frederick**

But, as you heard at the top of the show from Katherine Hayhoe:

**Speaker: Katherine Hayhoe**

...again, over 75% of the U.S., over 85 worldwide, faith communities often provide exactly that.

**Host: Robert Frederick**

The hope, love, encouragement, and sense of community in order to have sustained action to address climate change.

So, if, as Reverend Fletcher Harper says, that it works to talk with religious communities about the environment as a gift, a responsibility, that things are out of balance and we all need to wake up — and, at the same time, 75% of people in the U.S. find their community in faith — why still is it that religious Americans on the whole are more doubtful, even to the point of being completely dismissive, about climate change?

Again, Katherine Hayhoe.

**Speaker: Katherine Hayhoe**

One of the main narratives or frames used to talk about climate change in religious circles is that of a false religion. Believers of the true religion will recognize that false religion and reject it.

**Host: Robert Frederick**

Aha! Why a false religion? Consider that the scientific consensus about climate change has theological implications for many people.

**Speaker: Katherine Hayhoe**

How do we know this thing is real? If we think that God is in control, how could humans affect something as big as our planet? And what's a response to this issue that is consistent with who we are?

**Host: Robert Frederick**

And without religious leaders consistently answering those fundamental questions, well, climate change just becomes something to avoid discussing because it will just be something to fight about.

**Speaker: Fletcher Harper**

Is this a private fight or can anyone get involved?

**Host: Robert Frederick**

Again, Reverend Fletcher Harper.

**Speaker: Fletcher Harper**

It seems to me that certainly climate change represents the most public fight of our generation and perhaps of the new century.

**Speaker: Matthew Nisbet**

If this is the challenge — how do we connect climate change to religious identity, particularly Christian identity, and in particular conservative Christian identity...

**Host: Robert Frederick**

Matthew Nisbet researches science communication at Northeastern University.

**Speaker: Matthew Nisbet**

... and how do we work through churches to get people involved on the issue of climate change and to communicate with them, we need to provide support and resources to congregational leaders, and the scientific community needs to be a part of that process.

**Host: Robert Frederick**

The research and resources already out there? One of them making the rounds was published by ecoAmerica and includes example faith-based messages, even whole sample sermons. You can find it on the Internet under the title 'Let's Talk Climate Change: Messages to Motivate Americans.' The best of these messages, says Nisbet...

**Speaker: Matthew Nisbet**

Importantly, they employ a story arc — a narrative arc — that encompasses a challenge, an action, and a resolution similar to the story arcs that are found in religious teachings or in popular movies, for that matter.

**Host: Robert Frederick**

Sure, consider the Star Wars saga — the story begins with Anakin Skywalker, who is conceived... well, he's a miracle baby conceived by a woman who says he has no father. But Anakin — he's a child with extraordinary gifts. Sound like any popular religions you might know about?

So I invite and challenge you, dear listener, to write a narrative about climate change that employs a story arc, encompasses a challenge, an action, and a resolution. Give it a try. Then write to us at [TheConjectural.com](http://TheConjectural.com) to let us know how it goes. You can also record yours and send it to us, and we may use it in a future show.

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