

Jeb Bush's environmental views seem to be evolving. At a recent [speech](#) at Liberty University, he had this to say about environmental protection:

*"America's environmental debates, likewise, can be too coldly economical, too sterile of life . . . Christians see in nature and all God's creatures designs grander than any of man's own devising, the endless glorious work of the Lord of Life. Men and women of your generation are striving to be protectors of Creation, instead of just users. Good shepherds, instead of just hirelings. And that moral vision can make all the difference."*

Perhaps not coincidentally, he expressed concern a month earlier about climate change and said that increased use of natural gas plus energy conservation were the right strategy. If you stop and think about how these strategies reduce carbon emissions, the answer can only be that they displace coal. But so far at least, his GOP opponents haven't accused him of a war on coal.



Pope Francis

Another possible coincidence: the Pope has already spoken publicly about the urgency of addressing climate change and is preparing an official pronouncement. So far as I know, that proclamation won't fall into the *ex cathedra* category where the doctrine of Papal infallibility. Still, I would imagine that many Catholics (though not the most hard-core conservatives) will feel some tug toward the Pope's position. Keep in mind that there are six Catholics on the Supreme Court (Samuel Alito, Anthony Kennedy, John Roberts, Antonin Scalia, Sonia Sotomayor, and Clarence Thomas), There are also 164 Catholics in [Congress](#). Even a small movement among this group toward greater openness to carbon regulation would be significant.

Without being unrealistic about the potential for religious leaders to change the views of their followers, religious is a potent force, and it's a stereotype to assume that it inherently favors conservative views. The possible link between religion and environmentalism hasn't gotten much attention from legal scholars, with the notable exception of [John Nagle](#). In particular, Nagle has [written](#) about an environmentalist strand among evangelicals. Maybe the Pope's upcoming climate pronouncement really will help get some conservative Catholics to rethink their positions about climate change.