

Is Environmentalism a Religion?

Notwithstanding recent scandals regarding the suppression of climate change data, public policy and popular world views on climate change and man's contribution to it remain largely unchanged. This workshop critically reviews the scientific evidence for global warming and the predictions for future climate change taking into account scientific methodology and the limitations of computer modelling. An analysis of the data suggests that man's contribution to climate change is overstated and that public policy is biased. We argue that the popular view that "the science is settled" is supported by a "post normal science" approach to policy that relies more on opinion than fact, giving rise to an orthodoxy of almost religious dimensions throughout much of the western world. The workshop concludes by arguing that a carefully thought through theology of creation and stewardship is necessary for Christians to formulate a correct and proportionate response to environmental issues such as climate change.

Jeremy Peckham began his career as a government scientist at the UK Royal Aircraft Establishment and later moved to Logica, an international software and systems integration company. He founded his own speech recognition company in 1993 and launched a successful public offering on the London Stock exchange in 1996. Jeremy is now a technology entrepreneur having helped to establish several high tech companies over the last 15 years where he has served as interim CEO, Chairman or non executive director. He set up and is Chairman of a private Charitable Trust. One of its projects, Africa Rural Trainers (www.africaruraltrainers.org), trains rural pastors in Kenya in bible understanding and practical skills in a sustainable way through business engagement. Jeremy served as an elder for many years at Eden Baptist Church, Cambridge, UK. Jeremy is a Fellow of The Royal Society of Arts and 1st class honours graduate in Applied Science.

Extended notes taken from part of my book *Crisis in Creation* (not yet published):

I. PART 1 THE SCIENCE IS SETTLED - OR IS IT?

A. The methods of science

The development of theories starts from observation, the collection of data and the development of a hypothesis that must be tested. Our presuppositions can influence the interpretation of our observations and the hypotheses that we develop. These presuppositions can have radical consequences where hypotheses cannot be adequately tested but become established as theory. Should we pay more attention to the role of falsification in theory development? Complex computer models of climate are extremely limited and dependent on many assumptions.

B. There's no data like more data

Review of the data that inform our views on climate change are surveyed and their reliability and adequacy for the purpose. The conflicts that exist between satellite and surface temperature measurements cast doubt on the extent of global warming due to greenhouse gases. Past climates appear to have been very different based on historical

recordings and proxy data studies for temperature and carbon dioxide levels showing that carbon dioxide increases lag behind temperature increases. Some of the proxy studies that were used to suggest a recent “hockey stick” rise in temperature have been discredited although they played a significant role in early policy development. The IPCC advisory panel however rejects historical data on pre-industrial carbon dioxide measurements recently uncovered that show a higher base level than they use in their models. Sea levels have been rising at a similar rate for over 3000 years and there is no evidence that extreme climate events have increased in the 20th century.

C. Hypothetically speaking

The hypothesis that human carbon dioxide production from burning fossil fuels has caused unprecedented temperature rises is based on a model of the contribution various so called greenhouse gases make to the earth's energy balance. The significance of anthropogenic carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas hinges both on its' contribution to overall levels as well as the sensitivity of the earth's energy balance to increases in concentration. Actual measurements show that anthropogenic levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are significantly smaller than those predicted by models calling into question the accuracy of the carbon cycle models used. Water vapour is the dominant greenhouse gas and has by far the more significant impact on incoming radiation but this factor is played down in public reporting on climate change.

D. Circular Arguments

Complex computer models of climate are used to inform public policy yet these are, even by the admission of some of their proponents, limited in their ability to forecast and predict future climate. Climate is acknowledged to be highly complex and ill understood, yet computer models rely entirely on the hypotheses, assumptions, equations and feedback mechanisms that they are based upon. To the extent that they are used to demonstrate climate sensitivity to carbon dioxide, they are bounded by the questionable assumptions on the significance and precise contribution of carbon dioxide contributions to climate change. In practice this amounts to a circular argument with the models inevitably showing what they were set up to demonstrate.

E. Climate of change

The public rhetoric on what used to be called anthropogenic global warming has now changed to statements about climate change, subtly linking a questionable assumption to a phenomenon that cannot be denied. It is unquestionable that climate changes, however the correlation of carbon dioxide levels with temperature trends does not prove a causal link. Historically temperature increases have preceded carbon dioxide increases as a careful inspection of the graphs used in Al Gore's film an Inconvenient Truth demonstrate. Icons of anthropogenic global warming such as the melting of Kilimanjoro's ice cap are shown by scientists to be attributed to other causes. The possible causes of changes in climate are discussed including the role of ocean currents, land use change and cosmic ray flux on cloud formation.

II. PART 2 THE RISE OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

A. Truth or dogma?

The evidence presented in part 1 suggests that human contribution to carbon dioxide plays a minor role in warming and there are other explanations for climate change. Biases and vested interests in the IPCC and a flawed process results in scientific opinions being presented to the public and politicians as proven fact. The media propagate these views unquestioningly.

B. Post Normal Science

Post modernism has influenced science particularly in the way that public policy is determined. Post Normal Science relies on opinions rather than hard facts where there is uncertainty. The late Richard Feynman coined the term "Cargo Cult Science" to describe the dangers inherent in a flawed approach to science, yet a similar approach is evidence in climate science. Objective truth is lost and opinions become the new truths. The politicisation of science coupled with this post normal approach stifles dissent and brands sceptics as "refusniks" or "deniers" which ultimately harms true scientific endeavour and the quest for truth.

C. Being religious

Some secular commentators such as Lord Lawson and the author Michael Crichton claim that environmentalism has become a religion. The adoption, albeit unwittingly by some including many Christians, of the Post Normal Science approach to evaluate Climate Change has resulted in opinions becoming dogma. This has contributed to the development of environmentalism, of which climate change is a part, that takes on the characteristics of a worldview if not a religion.

D. So be careful

A correct theology of creation must start from an understanding of God's purposes and ultimate ends rather than being human orientated as it is so often. Various bible passages throw light on what our precise responsibility is and what it means to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. We can deduce the practical outworking of stewardship over the earth with reference to Old Testament law, prophetic judgements and Jesus' teaching in the gospels. The reality of sin however, can result in selfish exploitation of the environment and natural resources. The biblical mandate for Christians to love the truth, speak the truth in love and exercise discernment require us to engage honestly with the issues raised by environmentalism and climate change in particular. We need to tread carefully when condemning the sceptics.