Secular Substitute for the Apocalypse

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Dear Colleague: Global warming is the apocalypse with an environmentalist twist.

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Last month, a group of 86 evangelical Christians, including some highly prominent and influential leaders, issued a statement endorsing the global warming myth and calling for economically crippling action. The tide of hysteria over this profane reworking of the Bible’s apocalyptic prophecies continues to rise, and it seems environmentalists and their media allies are succeeding in pulling more conservatively-inclined religious people into their doom-mongering orbit. This is not to say that there are no legitimate environmental concerns—but global warming isn’t one of them. Instead, it’s a cultural and political power grab by a Left disenfranchised by socialism’s discredit.

The statement of the Evangelical Climate Initiative says that scientific objections to the theory that human activity contributes to global warming are no longer worth considering and declares, “Even small rises in global temperatures will have such likely impacts as: sea level rise; more frequent heat waves, droughts, and extreme weather events such as torrential rains and floods; increased tropical diseases in now-temperate regions; and hurricanes that are more intense. It could lead to significant reduction in agricultural output, especially in poor countries. Low-lying regions, indeed entire islands, could find themselves underwater. (This is not to mention the various negative impacts climate change could have on God’s other creatures.) Each of these impacts increases the likelihood of refugees from flooding or famine, violent conflicts, and international instability, which could lead to more security threats to our nation.”

The science behind all of these assertions is questionable at best. The media trumpets a
finding that part of Antarctica’s ice sheets are shrinking—but downplays studies that find other Antarctic ice sheets growing. Many scientists believe that most global warming will occur in colder areas, making life more pleasant and extending the growing season. In fact, higher proportions of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere help most crops grow. There is no evidence that hurricanes are growing more intense. And biggest of all: Despite years of intense study, there is no way to show a correlation between human activity and global warming, which could easily be caused by increasing solar radiation as part of the sun’s natural cycle or natural fluctuations in the Earth’s climate caused by other factors. At any given moment in history, the Earth’s climate is either warming or cooling; nature rarely goes in a straight line.

All this has been thoroughly worked over elsewhere, such as on www.junkscience.com or in Michael Crichton’s State of Fear, or in the pages of our own PRI Review. What’s puzzling is why conservative Christians should buy into the anti-civilization, pantheistic fanaticism that environmentalists have been pushing for decades. (In my own mind, much doubt is cast on global warming because of my memory of the global cooling scare of the 1970s. The eco-obsessed crowd went from global catastrophe by cooling to global catastrophe by warming in less than 20 years.)

Leftist evangelicals such as Rev. Jim Wallis signed the declaration, but so did conservatives such as Rev. Rick Warren, author of The Purpose-Driven Life; Todd Bassett, National Commander of the Salvation Army; Dr. Duane Litfin, President of Wheaton College; Richard Stearns, President of World Vision; and Rev. Timothy George, Executive Editor of Christianity Today. Last year, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) put out its own concerns about global warming, but thankfully refused to endorse this Evangelical Climate Initiative. Yet Rev. Richard Cizik, Vice President of Governmental Affairs for NAE, is involved with the Evangelical Environmental Network and its Creation Care magazine, which promote global warming mythology.

Note: I suspect we will begin to see “climate change” continue to displace “global warming” as the fear-mongering term of choice. After all, any weather event that deviates from the mean, as most do, can be blamed on “climate change.” “Global warming” is too narrow and specific, and it might be putting some people off when exceptionally cold winters, high rainfall, low rainfall, etc. are all blamed on warming.

The evangelicals’ statement called for capping carbon dioxide emissions, the key element of the rejected Kyoto Treaty and a sure way to cripple the American economy, not to mention
send the remainder of our manufacturing jobs overseas. “In the United States, the most important immediate step that can be taken at the federal level is to pass and implement national legislation requiring sufficient economy-wide reductions in carbon dioxide emissions through cost-effective, market-based mechanisms such as a cap-and-trade program,” says the statement. “On June 22, 2005 the Senate passed the Domenici-Bingaman resolution affirming this approach, and a number of major energy companies now acknowledge that this method is best both for the environment and for business.”

The only way economic growth can continue, whether here or abroad, is if energy consumption continues to increase. Economists agree on that, by and large. America’s oil and electricity needs will continue to grow as her economy does. No technology is yet available that can change that except nuclear energy. And since environmentalists, bureaucrats, and lawyers have prevented the building of more nuclear plants, that means more fossil fuel consumption. The evangelicals’ proposal, or other similar proposals such as one from Sen. John McCain (R.-Ariz.) and Sen. Joe Lieberman (D.-Conn.), would put a stopper in the American economy.

Some might ask if that would be so bad. One thing it would be bad for is the environment. In the contemporary world, wealth is strongly correlated with a cleaner environment, while poverty is correlated with environmental degradation. In an excellent Aug. 20, 2002 article written in anticipation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, James K. Glassman wrote, “Let me offer a prescription for sustainable development that begins with a simple and powerful idea—an idea which, unfortunately, will often be at odds with what delegates, journalists and other observers hear in Johannesburg. The idea is that economic growth leads to levels of wealth and income that, in turn, inevitably produce societies that are cleaner, healthier and more stable and that use global resources more efficiently. It is an idea that has been validated in academic studies and by centuries of history, an idea that is especially important at this time and in this place.” As Julian Simon put it, “Human beings are not just more mouths to feed, but are productive and inventive minds that help find creative solutions to man’s problems, thus leaving us better off in the long run.”

Radical environmentalists have an anti-people agenda, even advocating the reduction of the Earth’s human population to 1 billion or less. They might want to ponder that the aging and increasingly childless populations of Europe, already putting a strain on the social services of their nations, will have less and less money to spend on environmental regulation, and less reason to preserve the land for future generations. And since the link between economic growth and environmental improvement has been ironclad in modern times, they
should also recall that economic growth has never in history accompanied long-term population decline. Nobody denies that poor countries have the worst environmental pollution and ongoing destruction, while rich Western nations have the best environments around-and getting better. We have passed through the industrialization-at-all-costs phase and now can afford more environmental protections.

Conservative evangelicals certainly aren’t the only ones infected with the global warming myth. The U.S. Catholic bishops endorsed a statement in June 2001 that said, “Human behavior and activity are, according to the most recent findings of the international scientific bodies charged with assessing climate change, contributing to a warming of the earth’s climate. Although debate continues about the extent and impact of this warming, it could be quite serious. Consequently, it seems prudent not only to continue to research and monitor this phenomenon, but to take steps now to mitigate possible negative effects in the future.”

The theory of global warming apocalypse is an exciting, compelling way for environmentalists, some scientists, and some politicians to enhance their own power and importance while feeding people’s fears of the future. It provides a substitute for a key aspect of Christian faith. It is much more inspiring than dealing with real but mundane environmental concerns: toxins in foods, animals raised on antibiotics, polluted water, and the like. In fact, the global warming myth diverts attention and resources away from environmental efforts that actually help God’s Creation. It’s phony all around.

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Glassman’s article may be found at:

http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/glassman082002.asp