

Climate Change



Pope Francis II is a brave man. Scientists have long insisted –because the United Nations sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change claims to have proof– that the world’s temperatures are climbing, and so climate as a whole is changing. Less snow and cold for Canada’s north, more drought for Australia, more hurricanes for America, more heat waves for Europe; the polar ice caps are melting and so the ocean levels will rise and flood out the world’s low-lying areas, etc, etc. The pope has studied the science, and concluded it’s all true. He tells us in his recent Encyclical that our “common home” needs urgent attention lest it become uninhabitable. I think it takes courage for a man of the cloth to pontificate about the findings of science.

Anthropogenic

Pope Francis is a very brave man. Climate is changing, our scientists say, because you and me and 7 billion others of our kind on this Planet are throwing too much pollution into the atmosphere through our cars and our factories, and so Planet Earth is baulking.... The pope puts it like this,

“Scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity.”

So climate change is *anthropogenic*, an expensive word that means that people are the cause of this climate change. It’s granted that in time past climate has changed too, but that was due to such natural phenomena as volcanoes or meteors or solar activity or simply the normal cycles of nature. But this time the fault lies with people; the current climate change is *man-induced*. The pope agrees with this conclusion too.

I’m not as brave as Pope Francis. I would not dare, in the name of God, to declare this science correct. I’m simply not in a position to argue one way or the other whether the world is actually warming up (some, after all, argue there is evidence to the contrary), and I’m also not in a position to debate whether the stuff we people spew into the atmosphere is in fact its (primary) cause. I’m at the mercy of the experts. In my opinion, the pope would have done better to stay with his calling....

There are a couple of things that can be said, I think, that plead for some serious discussion over some coffee.

Pollution

It is a simple fact that the world's 7 billion people are generating an enormous amount of pollution. I recall my father telling me that in his childhood there was no such thing as garbage. Today we churn out a barrel per family per week. A century ago there was negligible exhaust fumes from automobiles or airplanes. Today we belch it out by the thousands of tons per day. And then there's the factories..., pushing themselves to keep up with the market's demand for abundant and cheap commodities – and in the process the factories emit endless toxins into the atmosphere and into the waterways of our planet. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that pollution cannot be a good thing.

Waste

We're part of the market. The average Canadian –that includes me and the readers of this *Bit*– buys more clothes than he needs, and throws out clothes long before they're worn out. Some 40% of food grown in Canada for consumption is wasted, with about half the waste occurring in the household. Because we can afford it, North Americans buy countless gimmicks for our pleasure, use the item five times or eight, then forget about it, or replace it with an improved version – and in the process we keep factories cranking out exhaust, we burn up fuels, etc. The item itself sits on the shelf for some time, then ends up in the landfill. Or maybe just tossed out the car window....

Response

The whole process is obviously not good for the environment. The Christian admits that – and is going to do more than *say* so. The Christian will treat the Father's world with more care and consideration than he'll bestow on his mother's house. Yes, the Lord God entrusted this world to mankind's care (Gen 2:15), but the Christian will not ignore the wellbeing of the other creatures God placed on this planet and will seek to keep God's world beautiful, healthy, and clean. Damage God's world the Christian may not – no more than Adam was permitted to damage the Garden of Eden. If our standard of living is too demanding on the environment of which we're a part, the Christian will

1. Lower his living standard so as not to damage the environment God has entrusted to his care (including its creatures), or
2. Pull out all stops to develop technology that integrates his standard of living with the needs of the environment.

Either way, the Christian will not rest on his laurels. He'll be in the forefront of the campaign to care well for God's world – exactly because it's *God's* world.

In fact, the Christian needs to lead by example. And, as opportunity is there, the Christian needs to ensure that the land has laws to compel its citizens to respect the environment and to care for it well. So there's the topic for the first cup of coffee: are we, Christians in Smithville today, actually leading by example in caring for the world the Lord entrusted to us? And: are we *seen* to be leading by example?

Unbelief

There's something else to chew on over a second cup of coffee, and that's the relation between unbelief and climate change. Consider the following:

- If today rain “fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:12) so that the entire earth was covered with water (as in Noah's flood), we'd surely be speaking of climate change! And we're to note: the flood of Genesis 7 was *anthropogenic*, was man-induced. Said the Lord to Noah: “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them.... Make yourself an ark...” (Genesis 6:13,14). Point: here's a direct connection between sin and weather, or climate change if you will.

- The Lord's hand pressed upon Egypt so that plagues of gnats, plagues of flies, plagues of hail, plagues of locusts, even blackest darkness beset the land. What weather systems did the Lord use to bring plagues of gnats upon Egypt? And plagues of flies? And devastating hail (in a land that 'never' received hail)? And locusts? To say nothing of darkness? Surely, here too there's a direct connection between Egypt's sin and the weather conditions that made gnats, flies, and locusts multiply, and the climate that brings hail to a land of no rain.
- In His covenant with Israel the Lord said, "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rain in their season.... But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments..., I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze" (Leviticus 26:3f; 14, 19). Abundant rain, no rain; the Lord sets a direct link between people's conduct and climate.
- In keeping with His promise in Leviticus 26, the Lord shut the heavens in the days of King Ahab's apostasy and granted no rain for 3½ years. Only when Elijah prayed did the Lord grant rain. Talk about weather/climate being anthropogenic!
- The plagues of the book of Revelation echo the link between human behavior and God's blessings or curse. Revelation 8 speaks of hail and of a third of the grass being burned up (vs 7). It speaks too of the sun being struck and of a third of the day turning dark (vs 12). Revelation 16 speaks of the sun receiving power to "scorch people with fire" so that they cursed God on account of the "fierce heat" (vs 8f). Yet, the passage continues, "they did not repent and give him glory" (vs 9). This passage too links people's behavior with what the climate does.

Significance?

If people would speak of a link between human conduct and climate change, it seems to me that people need do more than change external habits and seek improved technology (necessary as these things might be). People also need to come good with him whom God has made sovereign over all things, so that even the climate is today under Jesus' feet. This Lord of lords rules over God's world according to the norms of God's Word, and that includes bestowing blessing on obedience and curse on disobedience. It is beyond dispute that the (western) world as a culture has and is rejecting God and cutting him and his laws out of our civilization's worldview. God is not mocked, and so our civilization must invariably taste that he remains faithful to his promises – including those promises relating to climate change.

Answer

Here, then, is what's lacking in the Pope Francis' *Encyclical*. As a man publicly seen to speak on behalf of God, he should have done more than call for *repentance from environmental exploitation and selfishness* (and ignoring of the poor); he should have called his readers *back to faith in Jesus Christ crucified to reconcile sinners to God the Creator*. Then, at least, he would have done justice to his calling.

C Bouwman
25 June 2015