



Global Warming and the Definition of Sin

By Bob DeWaay

In early 2006 PBS contacted Jan Markell and asked to send a camera crew to film her radio show if she would do one on global warming. They were looking for her response to the global warming statement signed by evangelicals such as Rick Warren, Brian McLaren, and Leith Anderson. Jan asked me to join her because of my background in science. I studied chemical engineering at Iowa State University and took classes like organic chemistry, physical chemistry, physics, etc. One thing that we worked with was the combustion of hydrocarbons, which is at issue in the global warming debate.

Since there was a possibility that Jan and I would end up on national TV (we did not), I did extensive research to make sure I could speak intelligently on the topic. This research included reading the entirety of Al Gore's book *Earth in the Balance*. Now Gore is back in the news because of his movie on this topic and the Peace Prize. I am not interacting with Gore for political reasons, but for theological ones. Politicians from both major parties have gotten involved with the issue of global warming including the Republican governor of California Arnold Schwarzeneger who has been in the news for similar reasons as Gore. But Gore has become the key spokesperson on the issue.

Reading Gore's book gave me a first hand glimpse at what the world looks like through the eyes of what is essentially a pagan worldview. What I mean by that is that Gore defines sin in such a way that being a normal human being is a sin on par with Hitler and Nazi Germany. Furthermore there is no forgiveness for this sin and no possible redemption.

Let me back up and explain how Gore sees the world and arrives at his conclusions. First we need a short lesson in the combustion of hydrocarbons. Life is possible on Planet Earth because of the unique properties of carbon. It can be bonded with itself and hydrogen (and other) molecules in myriads of ways. For example, when studying organic chemistry, I learned about the heme molecule that makes it possible for the cells of our body to have the necessary oxygen to burn hydrocarbons as fuel. My professor drew a diagram of that molecule and said that if one carbon-carbon bond in this molecule was different we would all be dead because this molecule could not carry

oxygen to the cells of our body. The moment I heard that, I rejected evolution and came to believe that God created the world.

The unique properties of carbon are such that combustible hydrocarbons are found everywhere on Planet Earth. When I was studying at Iowa State, the pollution issue (I wrote a paper on air pollution for one of my classes in 1970) was the presence of such things as compounds of sulfur and nitrogen that do not burn cleanly like a pure hydrocarbon does. All hydrocarbons are converted to carbon dioxide and water when they burn. But the impurities in coal, for example, caused byproducts such as sulfur dioxide to be dumped into the atmosphere. Thus when I was studying this in the early 70's acid rain was the big issue. But this sort of pollution has been largely eliminated through better technology. Cars and coal burning utilities now burn much more cleanly which means that as we approach the pure burning of hydrocarbons, most of the exhaust is carbon dioxide and water. The result is cleaner air.

But now there is a new development. Many in the environmental movement have defined CO₂ (carbon dioxide) as a pollutant, a noxious “gas.” They use the phrase “green house gas” because the term “gas” sounds like something poisonous. But oxygen is a gas as well. Having defined a normal byproduct of all burning of hydrocarbons as a noxious gas, those who produce it are deemed guilty of sinning against the natural world. Gore's book likened those who produce CO₂ to the Nazi's of WWII. He urges that people join a “resistance movement” like some did during that war. He uses WWII analogies throughout his book with “industrial civilization” playing the role of Hitler and environmental activists playing the role of noble “resistance fighters.” Gore writes, “Today, most of the world is looking the other way, pretending not to notice industrial civilization's terrible onslaught against the natural world.”^[i] His book is filled with terms such as “onslaught, siege, evil forces, and terrible, moral consequences.”

But if we step back and more carefully examine the issue, we see that our “sin” as defined by this neo-pagan worldview^[ii] is that of going about ordinary life. The “evil” that is being perpetrated is that humans have multiplied on the face of the earth and humans, every last one of us, are producers of the “noxious gas” CO₂. Every one of the 6 billion people on the earth has to find food, breath air, build some time of shelter, and have transportation. These activities require the combustion of hydrocarbons in one way

or another. Humans have been putting CO₂ into the environment since they discovered how to light a fire!

The problem, according to Gore, is that we have gotten too good at it. The more “industrialized” we become the more hydrocarbons we burn. So the primitive villager with a small garden, a hut, who cooks with an open fire produces much less CO₂ than someone who drives to and from work, has electricity in his house, and lives in a climate controlled environment. Therefore those of us who fit that category are the worse sinners. In fact our evil is even likened to the “holocaust” in Gore’s book. That also shows neo-pagan thinking because something inanimate, earth, elevated to the status of humans created in God’s image. But in that worldview, humans are piling guilt and sin upon ourselves day after day because we go about such activities as driving to work, cooking our food, heating our houses, and breathing air. According to neo-pagan environmentalists, we must be stopped for the sake of Planet Earth.

Gore has been recently called a hypocrite because he lives in a house where he uses 20 times the national average amount of energy. He replied by pointing out that he pays extra for the privilege by buying “offsets.” Debra J. Saunders wrote a column that ran in the March 7th, 2007 editorial page of the Minneapolis Star Tribune entitled “Carbon indulgences for the modern sinner.” She compared Gore’s purchase of “offsets” for his \$30,000 a year energy bill for his Nashville home to the type of “indulgences” for sin sold by the Catholic Church before the Reformation. So I am not the only one to notice that Gore has defined the use of energy as “sin.” In his case he is rich enough to offset his sin through paying extra money for the privilege. Saunders followed that editorial with one published in the April 20, 2007 Star Tribune that accused Governor Schwarzenegger of similar hypocrisy: “The gas-guzzling governor is on the cover of Newsweek. The Austrian Oak is now global warming’s jolly green giant.”

But in his mind, Gore and cohorts are the heroes of the world fighting the evil the rest of us are perpetrating:

As individuals, today’s resistance fighters often share the character traits psychologists found in those from World War II. Whether these new fighters live in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or environmentally stressed areas of the industrial world,

they are in most cases ordinary people with a deeply embedded sense of right and wrong . . . and a stubborn refusal to bend their principles even when the opposing force appears invincible and even deadly.[\[iii\]](#)

These heroes are fighting the sinners (ordinary people who do not sign up for their mission).

Neo-pagans define “sin” as some mass activity that society is doing that results in life that is less than paradise on earth. They decry unhappy circumstances as the result of the sin of “industrial society.” While defending the individual’s right to kill unborn babies, commit homosexual acts, or engage in other behaviors the Bible calls “sin,” they indict the mass of ordinary people as being guilty of unmitigated wickedness. So how do we “repent” of the sin of putting CO₂ into the earth’s atmosphere? The only way any individual could stop sinning in this manner is to die!

Some radical environmentalists (not Gore) have suggested that the only hope is for most of the humans on earth to die.[\[iv\]](#) Gore, carrying on his WWII analogy, calls for an environmental “Marshal Plan.” He wants to stop population growth. The problem is that 6 billion people cannot survive without producing massive amounts of CO₂. The reason so many people are able to live is because of human resourcefulness in using energy to produce food, heat, and shelter. Plus, the information age has made technology reproducible around the world so that countries with huge populations, such as China, are now joining the industrial revolution in a big way. And unlike the United States, China has been relatively unconcerned about any environmental issues.

The irony about Gore and other neo-pagans, is that the reason people in the United States have cared about such things as clean air (CO₂ does not make air “unclean” or harmful until about 5000 ppm and even with industrialization the atmosphere contains about 350 ppm and plant life flourishes because of it) clean water, and disposing of waste in a way that harms neither the environment or the beauty of the land, is because we have been heavily influenced by moral values from the Bible. We believe that humans are created in God’s image and are responsible for caring for the rest of the creation. Al Gore erases the distinction between man and the rest of the creation and claims that God’s image is not uniquely in man, but that all of creation is like a hologram image with the

whole picture present in each part. His theology emphasizes immanence at the expense of God's transcendence. Carrying on his hologram analogy, Gore writes, "By experiencing nature in its fullest—our own and that of all creation—with our senses and with our spiritual imagination, we can glimpse, 'bright shining as the sun,' an infinite image of God."^[v] Only Jesus Christ could say, "If you have seen Me you have seen the Father." Gore attributes Christ like attributes to the entire creation.

The problem with the immanent theology of neo-pagans is that once the transcendent is believed to be in the creation (panentheism) and humans are no longer considered uniquely created in the image of God, humans also have no reason to see themselves as stewards of the creation. Why should we be the ones responsible when in fact we are not unique? If God is in all of creation, then evidently God who is in the creation should be able to take care of Himself (creation). Gore even cites James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis approvingly which in the hands of neo-pagans turns the earth itself into a self-regulating goddess.

The result of deifying the creation has historically produced the destruction of creation. Vishal Mangalwadi has brilliantly pointed out that in his native India where the earth has long been considered a "goddess" the environment has been trashed for centuries and that Christian missionary William Carey worked to preserve the environment as well as the rights of abused women.^[vi] Gore's idea of adopting a theology that in some way deifies the creation so that we will respect it ignores that fact that this has not been the case where pagan nature cults have held sway.

Holding neo-pagan ideals and then redefining "sin" to cover nearly every aspect of living an ordinary life as a human being is to create ultimate hopelessness. Gore writes, "The struggle to save the global environment is in one way much more difficult than the struggle to vanquish Hitler, for this time the war is with ourselves."^[vii] Yes indeed we the evil doers must be vanquished before we drive to work one more time and emit CO₂ on the way. Our "sin" is that we have obeyed God's command to Noah after the flood: "*And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it*" (**Genesis 9:7**). Having done so we have become Hitler incarnate and must go to war against ourselves. Furthermore, if indeed producing CO₂ is a sin, then God was very pleased with Noah's sin: "*Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every*

clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done'” (Genesis 8:20, 21). Noah was releasing CO₂ into the atmosphere and God was pleased!

What is hopeless about the neo-pagan definition of sin is that there is no forgiveness, no redemption, and no way to stop sinning. There is only varying degrees of guilt depending on one's "carbon footprint." Since we have already been defined as "Hitlers" and we cannot stop sinning without dying, we can only chose to have a lot of guilt (or buy indulgences as some rich people do) or a little guilt. But since we cannot escape the status of guilty sinners, most of us just keep driving our cars to work. Evidently the only "redemption" in this system is to become a neo-pagan environmental activist.

Either global warming caused by humans producing CO₂ is true or it is false. If it is true and a collapse of the ecosystem is thereby at hand, then there is only one recourse—repent and believe the gospel. We are indeed sinners and we are so not because of making CO₂, but because of breaking God's moral law. But *Jesus Christ died for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust to bring us to God (1Peter 3:18)*. The earth is indeed facing a cataclysmic end, but that end will be because of God's judgment against the wicked world that spurns Him and His Savior, not because people breathe, cook, and heat their houses.

If CO₂ induced global warming is false, then we are being brow beaten into a guilty state over nothing. But even if the global environment is not about to go haywire and make life on earth a living hell, God's wrath is still directed against our sins. Therefore we should repent and believe the gospel. The blood of Jesus averts God's wrath against the sins of those who trust in Him. The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news, the "gospel" of enviromentalism produces a permanent state of guilt and hopelessness.

[i] Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance*, 1992, 282.

[ii] One can see the neo-paganism in the idea that the earth can be “sinned against” as if “she” were a deity. One must have personality to be sinned against.

[iii] Gore, 283.

[iv] This site has quotes from radical environmentalists:

<http://www.pushback.com/environment/EcoFreakQuotes.html>

[v] Gore, 265.

[vi] Vishal Mangalwadi, *When the New Age Gets Old*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992) 132 – 135.

[vii] Gore, 275.

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