



Climate Change and Blind Faith Religion

By Bob DeWaay

When EPA Secretary Scott Pruitt dared to doubt climate change orthodoxy, the StarTribune claimed he had set off a “climate uproar.” The prevailing assumption is that both future climate change and its main cause are known. However, if such change cannot be known with certainty, then this uproar over the unknown reveals something more than sober-minded science.

I was converted to Biblical Christianity in 1971 at Iowa State University. One of my last classes before switching to theology was physical chemistry. There, we used differential calculus to write equations to predict where electrons would be in their orbits. That use of such calculus strained the limits of what can be validly predicted using it. It still does.

One winter day students were protesting air pollution they saw as white smoke blowing across campus from our power plant. When I got to class, the professor told us that those students were protesting water vapor. When we have a clean burn of hydrocarbons, besides the release of energy, the by-products are carbon dioxide and water. CO₂ is invisible so what they saw that provoked the protest was water vapor. Over 45 years later, people are still protesting water vapor as witnessed by pictures of power plant exhaust stacks taken in the middle of winter, spewing out white “smoke:” water vapor. The captions are about air pollution.

We must distinguish, whether in Christian theology or science, between what can and cannot be known. In 1987, a man published a booklet that presented 88 reasons why Christ would return in 1988. Though many thousands were sold, the book was doomed to be wrong. Christ himself said that no one knows when he will return. In Christian theology, what we can know about Christ is revealed in the Bible. When Christ will return cannot be known. When it comes to what cannot be known, multiple reasons, evidence or collaborating authorities are worthless. The unknowable remains that way.

Consider what can be known about the combustion of hydrocarbons. If there are no non hydrocarbons such as nitrogen or sulfur, and there is complete combustion to eliminate unburned hydrocarbons, then exhaust will be *only* CO₂ and water. Neither is air pollution. Both CO₂ and water vapor are normal and necessary components of earth’s atmosphere.

In regard to concern about climate change, we know by studying the past that climate does change; this is a given. But what we do not know is how it will change. We also cannot accurately quantify the various causes of change. Differential calculus is used in models to predict climate change. Differential equations do not yield a number but a function. The function is used to predict where something will be over time (like a planet in orbit). No such valid equation can be made about climate because there are too many variables, and they influence each other in unpredictable ways. CO₂ is only one variable. There are many other variables, such as particulates in the atmosphere, variation in sun activity, the interactions (fluid dynamics) of the movements of water vapor laden air with earth and sea and many more.

What cannot be known is how much CO₂ in parts per million in the atmosphere would make the climate more stable than it is. If, somehow, the amount of CO₂ magically became

constant, climate would still change in unpredictable ways. The amount that human activity contributes to climate change cannot be known with certainty.

I have studied and taught theology for the last 45 years. I have had to learn the lesson of not claiming to know what cannot be known. The man who claimed to know when Christ would return really had nothing but blind faith to go by. People who cite multiple reasons and authorities to support their claim to know how climate will be changed due to a change in CO₂ alone make the same mistake. By making CO₂ the problem we detract from dealing with what actually is pollution and should be eliminated. Blind faith is not suitable for science or religion.

Critical Issues Commentary

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