

Climate change: Science or religion?

Anthony J. Marolda

The study of how the climate changes is a valid topic of science marked by a long history of scientific inquiry. It is clear from reading news accounts every day, however, that "climate change" has become the "religion" of many people, including some scientists. For these people, the historical scientific method for studying physical phenomena doesn't apply to climate change. This becomes obvious when you compare the characteristics of scientific inquiry to those of religions.

Science is based on a community of investigators conducting their own research, sharing it with others and working toward a consensus about the facts. A scientist refuses to accept results on authority. In fact, as Thomas Huxley, a famous British biologist of the 19th century said "skepticism is the highest duty of a scientist, blind faith the one unpardonable sin." Religion demands belief, science requires disbelief.

Climate change demands belief. The "science is settled" and anyone who dissents is a "denier," a

derogatory term stolen from the description of the evil people who deny the Holocaust. So, not allowing dissent leads to blind faith, the "one unpardonable sin" in scientific study.

The famous scientist and author Michael Crichton was one of the first observers to identify environmentalism in general, and climate change in particular, as a religion. In a meeting with the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco in 2003, he said, "Today, one of the most powerful religions in the Western world in environmentalism. ... Increasingly, it seems facts aren't necessary because the tenets of environmentalism are all about belief. It's about whether you are going to be a sinner, or saved. Whether you are going to be one of the people on the side of salvation, or on the side of doom. Whether you are going to be one of us, or one of them."

A good example of what happens to perceived climate change non-believers, or infidels, is Bret Stephens, a newly hired columnist for the New York Times. He was previously employed by The Wall Street Journal and won the Pulitzer Prize in 2013 for

his commentary. He published his first column for the Times, titled "Climate of Complete Certainty," a few weeks ago.

In his column, Stephens made several points that, on their face, would not be controversial in discussing a "normal," science-based topic. His primary theme was that it is absurd to blindly support climate change without listening to both sides of the argument. For example, he said global "warming is indisputable" ... as is the human influence on that warming. Much else that passes as accepted fact is really a matter of probabilities. That is especially true of the sophisticated but fallible models and simulations by which scientists attempt to peer into the climate future. To say this isn't to deny science. It is to acknowledge it honestly."

The strong reactions of some readers of the New York Times, all members of the climate change church, was unbelievable, so much so that their actions made the national news for the next several days. Although not true, as confirmed in his comments above, in these readers' views, Stephens column

committed the mortal sin of "denying" climate change. Stephens received a massive amount of hate emails and tweets from Twitter trolls. "When is the Times going to get rid of you?" was one of the milder examples. "The ideas ppl like @BretStephensNYT espouse are violently hateful & should not be given a platform by @NYTimes" was like many that espoused that Stephens should be shut down by the paper. Many of the other comments can't be quoted in a family newspaper.

Another common theme of these people was to order a subscription boycott of the Times. "Each and every one of us should fully boycott the NY Times. Their actions are inexcusable. You cannot be an ostensible paper-of-record and allow a science denier to spread propaganda."

The most far-reaching reaction of readers was to create a petition on the change.org site, asking the Times to fire Stephens. It had 25,000 signatures soon after the column was published and continues to grow.

Paul Krugman is a fellow Times columnist who is a member of the climate change church. He has said

in one of his columns, "may you be punished in the afterlife for being a denier. Denial is an almost unforgivable sin."

While Michael Crichton was among the first to point out the implications of the climate change religion, many other qualified observers joined him. Dr. Richard Lindzen of MIT said "a surprisingly large number of people have concluded that all that is giving meaning to their lives is saving the planet by reducing their carbon footprint. People with no other source of meaning in their lives will defend their religion with jihadist zeal." He believes that the consequence is flawed science, which then results in catastrophic public policy.

Even the former head of the EPA in the Obama administration, Gina McCarthy, agrees with the "religion" idea. Speaking to the Democrats in the California state Senate earlier this year, she said, "The challenge I think we have is for some reason climate change has become a religion — a politically induced religion instead of science fact that now we have to embrace and move forward on."

George Cardinal Pell is an Australian prelate of the Catholic Church, based in the Vatican. He also shares the concept of the climate change religion. He said, in disagreeing with Pope Francis' stand on climate change, "In the past, pagans sacrificed animals and even humans in vain attempts to placate capricious and cruel gods. Today they demand a reduction in CO2 emissions."

Michael Crichton concluded his analysis with the following statement, with which I agree. "Because in the end, science offers us the only way out of politics. And if we allow science to become politicized, then we are lost. We will enter the internet version of the dark ages, an era of shifting fears and wild prejudices, transmitted to people who don't know any better. That's not a good future for the human race. That's our past. So, it's time to abandon the religion of environmentalism, and return to the science of environmentalism, and base our public policy decisions firmly on that."

Anthony J. Marolda is a physicist and resident of Annisquam.