

# 2nd Opinion: Facing fears & global warming

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With all of the pending disasters blamed on global warming blasting their way through the media, I can understand why many might fear the future climate. We are told emissions of greenhouse gases, mainly carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), are destroying not only polar bears and petunias, but the planet as a whole. If we don't "stop global warming," The End will surely come.

I am a climate scientist. My research and that of many others does not lead me to be afraid for the climate's future. However, I am fearful for other reasons:

- **I fear for my science.** The truth is, our climate system is so complex that we cannot predict its state even into next month. Nonetheless, I see high-profile individuals (usually untrained in science) making claims with unwavering confidence about the climate's trajectory and a looming catastrophe.

I do not see the humility this science demands. In fact, I suspect an anthropologist, isolated from the media, would observe this global-warming fervor as a religion complete with anointed authority figures, sacred documents, creeds, sins requiring absolution, castigation of heretics and even an apocalypse.

But science doesn't work by arguments-from-authority or depth-of-feeling. Lord Kelvin said, "All science is numbers." Our scientific discoveries should be the same, whether one is a Baptist, Buddhist or Bahai.

However, if I've learned one thing in this business, it is that we scientists are mere mortals, and we succumb to pride as easily as anyone else.

Claiming to know exactly how the climate works and what it will do decades from now has as much to do with belief as science.

- **I fear for humanity.** When people speak about “doing something about global warming,” please listen carefully. What they advocate are “solutions,” which lead to rationing of energy while having no climate impact. A hidden consequence of these “solutions” is to make energy more expensive—a regressive burden disproportionately inflicted upon the poorest among us.

Is this what we should promote?

Is this the message of Christ?

One fact I learned as a missionary in Africa is this: Without energy, life is brutal and short. Denying energy expansion in the developing world, which many advocate, is to condemn them to suffering and poverty.

The simple truth is that whatever the climate does—and our research at the University of Alabama in Huntsville does not support predictions of an impending disaster—the regulations proposed to date and promoted by the green agenda will have no measurable effect. Even a Herculean effort to build 1,000 nuclear power plants in the next 15 years will impact CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the climate by a tiny margin. (By the way, CO<sub>2</sub> is not a toxic gas; it is “plant food.” Indeed, fully one-sixth of the world’s food production is due to the extra CO<sub>2</sub> we’ve put back into the atmosphere!)

Am I advocating a scorched-earth policy for energy extraction? No. Energy advances are needed and will come as scientists and engineers develop them. We should promote research that delivers energy in new ways. I believe we can do it—just as we de-horsified transportation in the 20th century, I predict we will largely de-carbonize energy in the 21st.

But I believe we should not sacrifice those who need affordable energy now

on the altar of impotent solutions to “save the planet.”

• **Lastly, I fear for our faith.** As a life-long Southern Baptist, though hardly a fundamentalist, I see that we are being sought after by well-funded environmental groups whose agenda is far from that of the mission of Christ.

When these activists lobby our denomination and its leaders, we risk a diversion of our attention and resources away from our commissioned purpose toward one based on an uncertain science whose advocates call for actions which inflict suffering on the “least of these.”

Be aware! Behind that activist agenda is the intent to elevate the creation to a status inconsistent with Scripture. The Christian doctrine of creation is clear: Mankind is the peak of the creation pyramid (Genesis 1) and the center of life (Genesis 2).

Scientifically, we cannot prove the biblical value of human life. This is one of our faith-claims. My fear here is that some of us will fall victim to these tempting notions of “Creation Care” to “Save the Planet,” when in fact they subvert our theology and promote poverty under the veneer of giving evangelicals the comfort of claiming a 21st century sense of sophistication and political-correctness.

Please understand, we should not waste energy and the resources needed to produce this life-enhancing gift of creation. We should not destroy whole environments in its pursuit, as we now see most dramatically in the poorest countries where forest wood is devoured for low-grade fuel. I believe we will solve the energy issue with scientific research—and an optimistic heart—without increasing human suffering.

Amidst this contentious debate, I pray our eyes will never stray from the One who is our ultimate hope (Luke 1:50).

*John Christy earned a master's degree from Golden Gate Seminary and master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Illinois. He is the distinguished professor of atmospheric science and director of the Earth Systems Science Center at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, studying global climate since 1987. He is an adult Sunday school teacher and sings in the choir at Farley Community Church, a Baptist congregation in Huntsville. He and his wife, Babs, served as Southern Baptist journeyman missionaries in Kenya 35 years ago. His website is [www.nsstc.uah.edu/atmos/christy.html](http://www.nsstc.uah.edu/atmos/christy.html).*