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Pope Francis, Fossil Fuels Won't Cause Armageddon

Contrary to what Pope Francis says, fossil fuels are good for the poor and the Earth

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In an historic event next week, Pope Francis will make his first visit to the United States. It is expected to generate as much political interest as it will religious concerns. On Thursday, he will address a joint session of Congress, and on Friday he will speak to the United Nations General Assembly. He is widely expected to focus on climate change, a topic on which he shares much political ground with President Obama.

This will not be the first time Pope Francis has ventured into the global warming debate. The June 2015 release of his encyclical "Laudato si" marked his initial foray into the discussion. Therein, Pope Francis echoed President Obama's tune, claiming there exists "solid scientific consensus" that human activities are causing a "disturbing warming" of the climate, which left unchecked will result in a type of planetary Armageddon manifested by escalating temperatures, melting polar ice caps, rising seas, more frequent and more severe weather, ecosystem degradation, and plant and animal extinctions, all of which he claimed will severely affect humanity.

Given that this was the pope's stated position on global warming a mere three months ago, look for a familiar refrain to accompany his remarks in Washington and New York next week. He will likely repeat a challenge first issued in his June encyclical, which called for humanity to "recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming," which he believes is "aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels."

The Consensus Isn't

But are the pope's concerns over potential global warming based upon the best available science? Or are they significantly overinflated? Is the biosphere rapidly spiraling downward toward planetary Armageddon? Or is it marching forward toward biospheric rejuvenation? Is limiting fossil fuel use a policy prescription panacea? Or is it a recipe for social and economic disorder and regress?

With respect to the science, those who promulgate a fear of planetary Armageddon often conveniently fail to disclose that literally *thousands* of scientific studies have produced findings that run counter to their view of Earth's climatic future. As just one example, and a damning one at that, *all* of the computer models upon which this vision is based failed to predict the current plateau in global temperature that has continued for nearly two decades now. That the Earth has not warmed significantly during this period, despite an 8 percent increase in atmospheric CO₂, is a major indictment of the models' credibility in predicting future climate, as well as the assertion that debate on this topic is "settled."

Numerous other problems with the apocalyptic vision of our future climate have been filling the pages of peer-reviewed science journals for many years now, evidenced most forcefully by the work of the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change, which has highlighted the results of thousands of scientific studies challenging the alarmist and model-based vision of the planet's future. This large and well-substantiated alternative viewpoint contends that rising atmospheric CO₂ emissions will have a much smaller, if not *negligible*, impact on future climate, while generating several biospheric *benefits*.

Global Warming Could Be Good

Concerning such benefits, it is a well-established *fact* that atmospheric CO₂ is the major building block of nearly all life, as it is used by plants in the process of photosynthesis to construct their tissues and grow. As numerous scientific studies have conclusively demonstrated, the more CO₂ there is in the air, the better plants grow. They produce greater amounts of biomass, become more efficient in using water, and are better able to cope with environmental stresses such as pollution, drought, salinity, and high temperatures..

The implications of these benefits to society are enormous. One study, for example, calculated that over the 50-year period of 1961 to 2010, the direct monetary benefits atmospheric CO₂ enrichment conferred on global crop production amounted to a staggering \$3.2 trillion. Projecting this positive externality forward in time reveals it will likely bestow an additional \$9.8 trillion in crop production benefits between now and 2050.

By ignoring these realities, policy prescriptions calling for a reduction in fossil fuel use are found—on this basis alone—to be ill-advised. Yet there are still other important reasons to reject them.

The World Needs More Energy, Not Less

We live in a time when approximately half the global population experiences some sort of limitation in accessing the energy they need for the most basic of human needs, including the production of clean water, warmth, and light. One-third of those thus impacted are children. An even greater portion finds its ranks among the poor. How can a society turn its back on these individuals and deny them the right to increase their energy and fossil fuel use so that they can

increase their living standards? It is reprehensible to even consider such an action and it is certainly morally wrong to do so. The world needs *more* energy, not less.

Taxing or regulating CO₂ emissions is an unnecessary and detrimental policy option that should be shunned. Why would any government or religious institution advocate to increase regulations and raise energy prices based on flawed computer projections of climate change that will never come to pass? Why would any government or religious institution advance policy that seeks to destroy jobs, rather than to promote them? Why would any government or religious institution want to deny increasing energy access to those in the world who are in most need of it? And why would national governments or religious institutions actually “bite the hand that feeds them”?

It is high time for our world leaders to recognize and embrace the truth. Contrary to misguided assertions, political correctness, and even government or religious edicts, carbon dioxide is *not* a *pollutant*. Its increasing concentration only minimally affects our climate, while offering great benefits to the biosphere. Efforts to regulate and reduce CO₂ emissions will economically burden society and yield little to no measurable impact on Earth’s climate.

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