

QUADRANT

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The Dark Green Shoes of the Fisherman

Theologians once devoted their energies to calculating the number of angels able to dance on the head of a pin. Today, in the thrall of dubious science and warmist pamphleteers, Pope Francis has put his seal on a document larded with 'facts' no less improbable than those cavorting cherubim of old



While the infallibility of the Pope is a matter of debate and doctrinal subtlety, the fallibility of whoever wrote the Pontiff's encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home*, is irrefutable. In incorporating an undigested, evidence-free regurgitation of alarmist hype and misinformation, it does no service to the Church or humanity. While the document's general concern for our planet's environment is laudable, the focus on threats and problems, while largely ignoring the numerous successes and improvements, serves more to proclaim the authors' conspicuous righteousness than to encourage further betterment.

The following is a sample of some of the false or misleading statements, found on pages 18 to 37 — the Encyclical section dealing with “pollution and climate change”. Statements from the Encyclical are in *italics*. My comment follow in plain-face text.

Page 18:

A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. (page 18)

Multiple datasets show no statistically significant warming for over 18 years. The claimed warming over the 20th century is within past limits of natural variability. Current temperatures are still below those indicated for the Medieval Warm Period and well below those of the Holocene Climate Optimum about 6000-8000 years ago.

In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events....

This is simply misleading. The rate of sea-level rise has not increased from that of the pre-industrial period, while current sea levels are 1-2 metres below those of the Roman Warm Period and between two and four metres below those of the Holocene Climate Optimum. Multiple studies also find that the frequency and intensity of storms, blizzards, droughts, floods, tornadoes, and heat waves over recent years are all well within earlier historical limits of the past 150 years.

Page 19:

...a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity....

No evidence exists as to what portion of any warming is due to greenhouse gases and how much might be due to various other influences both natural and anthropogenic.

Another determining factor has been an increase in changed uses of the soil, principally deforestation for agricultural purposes.

No evidence is available on the net climate effects of deforestation for agricultural purposes, nor for the irrigation which is often associated with it.

Warming has effects on the carbon cycle. It creates a vicious circle which aggravates the situation even more, affecting the availability of essential resources like drinking water, energy and agricultural production in warmer regions, and leading to the extinction of part of the planet's biodiversity.

The feedback effects of warming are highly uncertain and controversial. At this time we don't even know whether they are a net positive or a negative.

Things are made worse by the loss of tropical forests which would otherwise help to mitigate climate change.

The climatic effect of clearing tropical forests for agriculture and grazing are also highly uncertain and controversial.

Page 20:

Carbon dioxide pollution increases the acidification of the oceans and compromises the marine food chain.

The most recent and comprehensive examination of oceanic pH data indicates no change over the past century. The widely publicised claim of a 0.1 reduction in pH from pre-industrial levels is an estimate based only on unverified computer modelling. Even if the 0.1 reduction, as well as a further predicted 0.1 reduction by 2100, were correct the oceans would not be acidic, only a bit less alkaline. To call this acidification is misleading.

Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods.

By definition, any catastrophic change would have grave implication, but abundant evidence now indicates that the threat of catastrophic change has been greatly overestimated. At present the only reasonably certain effect from increased atmospheric CO₂ has been a valuable increase in primary productivity. This includes a notable greening of arid regions along with significant increases in agricultural yields.

Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry.

This is a truism. Without better knowledge of the magnitude and nature of any effects, whether they will be detrimental or beneficial is unknown. To say that the poor live in areas that will be *particularly affected* is misleading. It is generally accepted that warming will be greatest at high latitudes and relatively minor in the tropics.

...changes in climate, to which animals and plants cannot adapt, lead them to migrate....

Another meaningless truism, especially so in the absence of evidence — or even a credible estimate of magnitudes.

Page 21:

There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation.

Simply not true. The migrants are not fleeing poverty caused by environmental degradation; they are fleeing poverty stemming from corrupt and incompetent governments, overpopulation and religious persecution. One might think that the Pope, of all people, might have something especially relevant to say on the last two problems.

Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world.

Again, this is not true. There is actually widespread and growing concern, as it is increasingly the developed countries to which they are fleeing. What to do about it is the problem, not indifference. Pointing righteously at an all too obvious problem contributes nothing to helping solve it.

There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy. Worldwide there is minimal access to clean and renewable energy.

To call CO₂ highly polluting is simply ignorant. It is vital to life, with current levels well below those that have prevailed for most earth's history.

Page 22:

The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty.

Acceptable to whom and on what basis? A smaller portion of the population now lives in poverty than ever before; generally, people are living longer, healthier, more comfortable and interesting lives than ever before. If this is due to “exploitation” perhaps we need more of it, not less. Exploitation simply means ‘use’. Trying to equate it to destructive over-exploitation is deceptive. As poverty, it can probably never be totally “solved”, but huge reductions have been made in recent decades.

Page 25:

Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species....

The number of documented extinctions per year can be counted on one’s fingers and the rate is not increasing. The claim of thousands comes from unverified computer modelling which assumes large numbers of unknown micro-species succumbing to habitat destruction. This is entirely a hypothetical possibility unsupported by any firm evidence.

Page 28:

Let us mention, for example, those richly bio-diverse lungs of our planet which are the Amazon and the Congo basins....

Tropical rain forest is estimated to account for about 22% of global net primary productivity and, when converted to crops or grazing, productivity is reduced to about half that. Globally about one-third of tropical rainforest area has been de-forested over the past two centuries. In the Amazon and Congo basins deforestation has been somewhat less than this, and in the Amazon there has been considerable forest regrowth in cleared areas over recent years

Page 29:

...marine life in rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, which feeds a great part of the world’s population, is affected by uncontrolled fishing....

Another truism. In nations where fishing is intense and largely unregulated, the result has not been a collapse of the fisheries but, rather, a high-level plateau, with the bulk of the catch comprising small, fast-growing species low on the food chain. Overfishing presents a problem regarding the optimal use of resources, not one of preventing extinctions. No extinctions from fishing are known to have occurred.

Page 30:

Many of the world’s coral reefs are already barren or in a state of constant decline.(this) is aggravated by the rise in temperature of the oceans.

Although many reefs are overfished they are far from “barren”. In fact many of the most heavily fished reefs also support thriving dive tourism attracting millions of visitors who come to see the beautiful reef life. Obviously they would not be coming if the reefs were “barren”. As for rising temperatures, neither satellite monitoring of ocean surface

temperatures nor the global network of highly accurate monitoring buoys shows any such warming of tropical seas.

Page 32:

The social dimensions of global change include the effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity.

These problems have always been present and were worse in the past than they are today. Trying to conflate them with economic growth and development is misleading.

Page 34:

...rises in the sea level mainly affect impoverished coastal populations who have nowhere else to go.

This is another hypothetical. We have seen no waves of so-called climate refugees. Given the poor record of predictions from the climate-change industry on other matters, experience says we are unlikely to do so.

...there is little in the way of clear awareness of problems which especially affect the excluded. Yet they are the majority of the planet's population, billions of people.

A recent World Bank Global Monitoring Report shows a strong ongoing decline in global poverty figures. It would seem the poor no longer represent a majority of the world population.

Page 35:

Instead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate.

That is because resolving the problems of the poor has proven to be eminently possible with a reduction in birth rate but difficult-to-impossible to achieve without it and reduction seem to arise dramatically with the education of women.

Page 37:

The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming.

Never mind that there has been no warming for almost two decades, plus the recent report in *Nature Climate Change* which claims that greenhouse gases were the main factor in ending the severe drought from 1972-1984.

Climate change hysteria, having debilitated science and heavily infected the media, NGOs, politics and sundry interest groups, now appears to have morphed into a virulent strain of fundamentalist belief to which even the Pope seems to have no immunity.

*Walter Starck, a regular **Quadrant** contributor, has been researching coral reefs for more than 50 years. His biography [can be found here](#)*