

Using Earth's blessings to better mankind and planet

Rational thought underlies conservative Christian views on climate change and the environment

David R. Legates

Although he has rarely been willing to discuss or debate energy or environmental issues with those who do not share his views, environmentalist David Suzuki frequently challenges them on other grounds. In his recent article, "[Religious Right is wrong about climate change](#)," Suzuki claims that some US and Canadian scientists hold religious views that are anti-science.

Suzuki asserts that some climate scientists – including me, by name – put “misguided beliefs above rational thought.” His implicit assumption is that conservative Christian views are irrational and incompatible with science, and that I have replaced Almighty God with the “almighty dollar,” believing the economy matters more than the environment.

As a coauthor of the Cornwall Alliance's *Renewed Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Examination of the Theology, Science and Economics of Global Warming*, which forms the basis for the *Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming* that Suzuki criticizes, I know the [Cornwall Alliance](#) fully and carefully integrates scientific, economic, ethical and theological reasoning to support its conclusions. There's nothing at all irrational about it – unless you consider religion irrational *per se*.

However, Suzuki is correct regarding one aspect of my belief: the economy *does* matter as much as the environment. Good environmental stewardship *requires* sound financial footing – and improving and safeguarding human health and welfare requires maintaining a strong, vibrant, innovative economy that can sustain continued environmental progress.

When a country is in dire need of food, clothing, shelter and other necessities for life, it cannot possibly be concerned with environmental issues. The poor people of India pour untreated sewage into the Ganges River – and then draw their drinking and “cleaning” water from it. So poor that they're desperate simply for survival, they cannot possibly concern themselves with environmental stewardship. Only when economic improvements allow technological advancements to increase the quality of life, provide ample food and clothing, house citizens, provide clean drinking water, and treat and eradicate diseases can a thus wealthier society turn its attention to caring for the environment.

That is precisely what has happened in more developed nations. As the United States and Canada advanced economically, we developed technologies and policies that increased our quality and length of life. In turn, this has led us to be more proactive with our environmental stewardship.

We emit far less pollution and waste today, both per person and per unit of production, than we did fifty years ago. We feed more people with every parcel of land, we get more energy from every drop of oil, we are more efficient at everything we do, and we are much better stewards of our environment. But none of that could have occurred without a strong and developing economy.

Unfortunately, some so-called environmentalists wish to keep Africa and other developing nations in perpetual underdevelopment. They pay them off to be “environmentally conscious,” by giving them handouts – food and monetary aid – to keep them alive and perhaps have little solar panels on their huts. But they also ensure that those poor families never prosper or become middle class – so as to perpetuate environmentalist notions of “noble natives,” supposedly “at one” with their environment and living a “sustainable” existence.

Equally harmful, much of that money is lost to corruption, while the people are forced to continue living in a state of poverty, disease, malnutrition and deprivation, as technologies that could enhance their length and quality of life are denied to them. Among the technologies denied are modern seeds, fertilizers, and high-tech, high-yield farming methods to increase food supplies; natural gas and electricity to heat homes and cook food, instead of cutting down forests and burning wood, thereby degrading indoor air quality and causing lethal lung infections; refrigeration so that people do not have to choose between eating spoiled food and going hungry; and the use of insecticides, including the powerful insect repellent DDT, to spare them from the agonizing illness and death brought on by malaria.

Each of these enhancements requires plentiful, dependable, affordable energy. Yet in the name of “saving the planet” or “preventing cataclysmic climate change,” environmentalists like Suzuki deny developing countries the modern technologies and energy they need to improve their lives and environment – thereby perpetuating high infant mortality, significantly shortened life spans, and greatly decreased quality of life.

Climate alarmism is the rationale for these deadly policies – and that is where political ideology mixes with the *new* religion of environmentalism. Overstated or non-existent threats to the environment, along with impractical or imaginary ways to prevent the purported threats, are the new scripture on which the adherents develop their theologies and policies for directing and micromanaging the course of human events. Unfortunately, these eco-religionists never encounter (or intentionally avert their eyes from) the misery and devastation that their policies dramatically inflict on the world’s poorest people. That is because they are too concerned with “saving the planet.”

Back in North America, some wish to have energy rationed or be made increasingly expensive, creating artificial fuel poverty for millions. Such policies will make food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and medical care – in short, everything – more expensive and scarce, create more unemployed workers, push many people back into conditions of poverty and deprivation, and gravely impair human health and welfare. This strategy will not save the planet, as they hope, because one of its first casualties will be environmental stewardship. History and human nature both testify that, forced by economic limits to choose between a cleaner environment and food on the table, people always choose food.

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus told of a master who gave one of his servants a single talent, and then condemned him for hiding it in the earth and not putting it to use. Often we think of the talent only as money or ability, but it really stands for every resource – including natural resources. How will the Master of all creation judge us if we hide our resources in the earth, and then on Judgment Day say, “Behold, you have what is yours”?

If we do not use the resources God has set before us in the earth to care for those in need, our Creator will likely condemn us, saying: “You kept buried what I gave you, instead of using and investing it. You failed to employ my gifts to care for the poor, the hungry, the sick, and those who were dying from disease. You have been worthless, irresponsible stewards of my creation.” We would deserve the same fate as the servant the master called “wicked and lazy.”

I fail to understand how anyone thinking rationally can argue that poverty and economic hardship will enhance environmental stewardship, or that the planet is more important than the people who live on it.

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