

Deep Ecology, Neo-Paganism, and the  
Irrationalism of Global Warming Hysteria

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Australian Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, made worldwide headlines when he said, “some of the more hysterical and extreme claims about global warming appear symptomatic of a pagan emptiness, of a Western fear when confronted by the immense and basically uncontrollable forces of nature. Years ago,” he added,

I was struck by the fears that middle-class kids without religion had about nuclear war. It was almost an obsession with a few of them. It’s almost as though people without religion, who don’t belong to any of the great religious traditions, have got to be frightened of something. Perhaps they’re looking for a cause that is almost a substitute for religion. I often point out that some of those who are now warning us against global warming were warning us back in the 1970s about an imminent new ice age, because according to some criteria an ice age is a bit overdue. Remember the fuss about the millennium bug and our computer systems in the lead-up to the year 2000.

Cardinal Pell went on,

Belief in a benign God who is master of the universe has a steadying psychological effect, although it is no guarantee of Utopia, no guarantee that the continuing climate and geographic changes will be benign. In the past pagans sacrificed animals and even humans in vain attempts to placate capricious and cruel gods. Today they demand a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions.

As a religious leader, he said, he considered himself obligated “to engage with reality, to contribute to debate on important issues, to open people’s minds, and to point out when the emperor is wearing few or no clothes. I strive to argue rationally towards God the Creator, and reject substitutes, be they pantheist or atheist.”

“We need to be able talk freely about this and about the uncertainties around climate change,” Pell said. “Invoking the authority of some scientific experts to shut down debate is not good for science, for the environment, for people here and in the developing world or for the people of tomorrow. . . . Radical environmentalists are more than up to the task of moralizing their own agenda and imposing it on people through fear. They don’t need church leaders to help them with this, although it is a very effective way of further muting Christian witness. Church leaders in

particular should be allergic to nonsense.”<sup>1</sup>

Cardinal Pell is on to something here. He is mistaken to think that global warming alarmism and paganism are a substitute for religion, for they are themselves highly religious. But he is certainly correct to say that global warming alarmism has become a serious challenge to rational discourse and rests on religious foundations that are anything but historically Christian.

In April of last year I was among about eighty participants from around the world—scientists, politicians, economists, religious leaders—in a conference on climate change sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace at the Vatican. During the shuttle trip from our meeting place in Vatican City to our hotel the first evening, I sat beside a middle-aged woman, tall, read-haired, rather gangly looking. We exchanged names and struck up conversation. She was Mary Evelyn Tucker, a Senior Lecturer and Senior Scholar at Yale University where she has appointments in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies as well as the Divinity School and the Department of Religious Studies. She is a co-founder and co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, under which she helped organize a series of ten conferences on World Religions and Ecology at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School, from which issued ten volumes distributed by Harvard University Press. She is Research Associate at the Harvard Yenching Institute and at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies.

During our conversation Dr. Tucker challenged my opposition to the widespread belief in manmade, catastrophic global warming, saying I really had no right to promote any opinion about it since I’m not a climate scientist. Having learned that she was also not a climate scientist—her Ph.D. and an M.A. are both in the history of religions, her M.A. in English, and her B.A. in English and history—I then asked her why her judgment didn’t apply to herself. She appealed to the overwhelming scientific consensus that manmade warming is real and sure to become catastrophic if not thwarted by drastic actions to cut carbon emissions. I then asked her what books and articles she had read by bona fide climate scientists critical of that view.

“There aren’t any!” she retorted, with a look of complete contempt.

“None?” I asked with some incredulity.

“No,” she said.

I replied that I was a little surprised to hear her say that, since I had myself read about fifteen full-length books by climate scientists critical of the theory, plus scores of refereed and hundreds of non-refereed articles—as well as several books and hundreds of articles by climate scientists

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<sup>1</sup>“Global Warming and Pagan Emptiness,” interview of Cardinal George Pell by Michael Gilchrist, online at <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/environment/print/en0015.htm>.

who embraced her view. I averred that I thought it a little irresponsible and close-minded for her to refuse to read those who disagreed with her. One ought at least to understand the major arguments pro and con, I said. Dr. Tucker’s face hardened. She looked out the window of the shuttle bus, and the conversation was over. Her mind was made up.

The next day I delivered my paper for the conference. It was rather fun to be able to begin with a remark about the irony that, by God’s providence, a man named Calvin was speaking as an invited guest at the Vatican. (I did admit that my parents had named me after Calvin Coolidge, though, not after John Calvin.) I even managed to work the gospel of justification by faith into the paper. Near the end, I spoke of how the debate is carried on.

As a logic teacher[, I said], I am regularly grieved by the illogic often apparent in alarmists’ arguments (e.g., *non causa pro causa*, correlation taken for causation, consensus rather than data and explanation in science, *argumentum ad verecundiam*, and *argumentum ad hominem*, etc.). I could discuss the need for charity and mutual respect, or the misuse of arguments from prudence by resting them on a *petitio principii* of the reality, magnitude, and negative impacts of manmade warming, or **the sad tendency for people to reach conclusions before carefully examining counter-arguments—and then to ignore the counter-arguments or even to declare flatly that they don’t exist (which makes me wonder who slipped me the drugs that caused all my hallucinations when I thought I was reading such counter-arguments).**

I glanced across the room at Dr. Tucker as I finished that last observation—which I had added to the paper the night before with her specifically in mind (though it could describe *most* of the global warming alarmists with whom I have spoken through the years). She was livid and shortly got up and walked out.

Not being a specialist in the study of neo-paganism I had never encountered Mary Evelyn Tucker before. But just a few weeks later Peter Jones sent me the draft of a chapter on environmentalism from a book he was writing on neo-paganism. In that chapter he had extensive discussion of Tucker. I commented,

Hah! She was at the Vatican-sponsored GW conference I attended in Rome April 26-27. Talking with her at length on the bus from conference to hotel Thursday night was one of my most memorable experiences. Her irrationality was such that what flooded in on me was that talking with her was just like talking with a Jehovah’s Witness. Evidence didn’t matter. Logic didn’t matter.

Peter later e-mailed me saying,

How fascinating that you met Mary Evelyn Tucker. I am glad you saw through her. Most people do not for she is quite imposing and has an impressive resumé. She is an ardent

pagan believer who occupies a very powerful place in the international field of ideological paganism.

I replied that her “impressive resume” was irrelevant, that from her conversation with me it was clear that she was, on the issue we discussed, ignorant, arrogant, and irrational, and given to trying to intimidate rather than persuade. I added, “She also gave me the strongest sense of someone demonized that I’ve had in many, many years.”

Peter replied,

Of all you said, this is the comment that I find most revealing: “She [Tucker] also gave me the strongest sense of someone demonized that I’ve had in many, many years.” The reason is that my book tries to show that at the root of this intellectual construction of a pagan cosmology is an underlying spirituality which I can only describe as “shamanistic.” Your comment confirms that.

Peter’s chapter went on to tell more about Tucker:

Mary Evelyn Tucker, mentioned above, proposes the ancient world view of Confucianism [including *I Ching*, the *Book of Changes*] as a perfect model for our times. She points out that the Confucian idea that matter and energy are spiritual processes is beginning to be recovered, and cites as proof the works of Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme.

She emphasizes the modern appeal of ancient Confucian monism, which provides “a rich metaphysical, ethical and empirical basis for a this-worldly spirituality remarkable for its holistic and comprehensive qualities.” The notion of *Ch’i* (cosmic energy of the natural world) provides “a unified vision of reality...a non-dualistic cosmology for going beyond the conventional Western separations...” It so happens, she notes that this Confucian notion of *ch’i* is also found in the “earlier religious worldviews of indigenous traditions in their closeness to nature...”

How interesting that modern liberal Protestants also share this insight in a monistic, ecological redefinition of the Spirit.

The redefinition of the Spirit is characteristic of all neo-pagan, New Age, and indeed Humanistic thought. C. S. Lewis wrote brilliantly of this in his science fiction novel *Perelandra* in a memorable dialogue between the evil physicist Weston and the protagonist Ransom, in which Weston recounted how he had gone from his early metaphysical materialism to the thought that humanity was the pinnacle of creation and finally to the realization that *Spirit* was—or, Weston then said, what you Christians call the Holy Spirit. Ransom interrupted to say that he didn’t know for sure what Weston meant by Spirit, but he sure knew it wasn’t the same thing Christians meant

when, in the Apostles’ Creed, they said, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

But it is not only the Holy Spirit that gets redefined by neo-pagan thought. The very concept of spirit as incorporeal mind, “thinking thing,” as Descartes called it, is being replaced by a new concept of spirit. In historic Christian thought, the distinction between spirit and matter/energy plays a part in the distinction between God and creation that guards against pantheism. But in neo-paganism, both of those distinctions break down. And their breakdown contributes to the irrationalism of neo-paganism, including its understanding of ecology and the environment.

I would like in this lecture to discuss how embracing the world view of neo-paganism and deep ecology leads many in the global warming debate to remarkably irrational tactics in carrying on the debate. I should acknowledge from the start that I am not a specialist in the study of neo-paganism. I have read some books by neo-pagan environmentalists, and some books that critique neo-pagan environmentalism, but I did most of that reading about ten to fifteen years ago, and I have not kept up with new developments in the field. Nonetheless, I think I can provide a credible introduction to the thought.

Let me first give you a brief sketch of deep ecology.

Most deep ecologists are pantheists, and many explicitly embrace Hinduism, Buddhism, or Confucianism.<sup>2</sup> Deep ecologists are spiritual and religious in their attitudes toward environmental issues. Some actively seek to revive such pagan ways as Druidism, witchcraft, Native American religions, and—among feminists—goddess worship. Drawing from both the Eastern religions and Darwinian science, they tend to find man’s identity with the rest of nature in his ascent through the evolutionary chain of being. Thus, “One itinerant environmentalist conducts ‘workshops’ in which participants are urged to remember their alleged evolutionary history by rolling on the ground and imagining what their lives were like as dead leaves, slugs, and lichens.”<sup>3</sup>

Although today things are different, fifteen years ago and more, most deep ecologists rejected the pragmatic, political approach of the Greens, the politically active environmentalists of the time. Deep ecologists favored direct action through groups like Greenpeace, Earth First!, Sea Shepherds, Rainforest Action Network, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the Animal Rights Network, and the Animal Liberation Front. Today, however, there appears to be much more cooperation between deep ecologists and politically active environmentalists.

While today politically active environmentalists and deep ecologists tend to share the same basic world view and communication strategy, in the past the Greens cloaked their eco-disaster

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<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Steven Rosen, “Ahimsa: Animals and the East,” *The Animals’ Agenda* (October 1990), 21-5.

<sup>3</sup>Robert James Bidinotto, “Environmentalism: Freedom’s Foe for the ‘90s,” *The Freeman* vol. 40, no. 11 (November 1990), 409-420, at 410; citing Lindsey Van Gelder, “It’s Not Nice to Mess with Mother Nature,” *Ms.* (January/February 1989), 60.

claims in science while deep ecologists depended more on mysticism and intuition. Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher of ecology who would like to rid our planet of 98 percent of its people, is one of the chief framers of the deep ecology world view and the coiner of the phrase *deep ecology*.<sup>4</sup> He specified that his work consists not “of philosophical or logical argumentation” but is “primarily intuitions.”<sup>5</sup> Just how intuitive this world view—which Naess calls “ecosophy”—is may be illustrated by his student and translator David Rothenberg’s description of one of Naess’s lectures in Oslo:

After an hour he suddenly stops, glances quickly around the stage, and suddenly leaves the podium and approaches a potted plant to his left. He quickly pulls off a leaf, scurries back to the microphone, and gazes sincerely at the audience as he holds the leaf in the light so all can see. “You can spend a lifetime contemplating this,” he comments. “It is enough. Thank you.”<sup>6</sup>

(Don’t feel bad if you don’t get Naess’s message. The problem isn’t with you.)

The focus on intuition in the deep ecology movement explains, in part, why feminism allies itself with environmentalism, particularly with deep ecology and animal rights. Feminism rejects science outright—or redefines it—because science operates in a manner not sufficiently sensitive to “feminine thought patterns” because it is a fundamentally “masculine” discipline. “Science’s insistence on being tough, rigorous, rational, impersonal, and unemotional is intertwined with men’s gender identities,” says feminist theologian and animal rights theorist Carol Adams, author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*.<sup>7</sup>

At deep ecology’s root is the insistence that “all life is fundamentally one.” From this principle flows a new vision of Self-realization—with a capital *S*: “a bold attempt to connect the general statement that ‘all life is fundamentally one’ with our individual needs and desires.” Here all distinction between God and the world collapses in the vision of the one Self that encompasses not only all of life but all of everything.<sup>8</sup>

Naess insists, “Economic growth as conceived and implemented today by the industrial states is incompatible with” sound ecology. Consequently, “the implementation of deep changes . . . requires increasingly global action in the sense of action across every border, perhaps contrary to

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<sup>4</sup>Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movements: A Summary,” *Inquiry* 16:95-100.

<sup>5</sup>David Rothenberg, “Introduction: Ecosophy T: from intuition to system,” in Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. and rev. David Rothenberg (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2.

<sup>6</sup>Rothenberg, “Introduction,” in Naess, 1.

<sup>7</sup>Kim Bartlett, “Of Meat and Men: A Conversation with Carol Adams,” *The Animals’ Agenda* (October 1990), 13).

<sup>8</sup>Rothenberg, “Introduction,” 8, 9.

the short-range interests of local communities.”<sup>9</sup> Here is the root of deep ecology’s alliance with socialism and the movement toward a one-world government that would abolish national sovereignty.

It is crucial to recognize that deep ecology explicitly rejects any distinction between man and nature. Naess complains that although “Shallow Ecology” fights “against pollution and resource depletion,” its central objective is “the health and affluence of *people*. . . .” In contrast, deep ecology involves “Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of *the relational, total-field image*.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, man’s needs and desires are not to be considered as in any sense higher than those of the rest of nature, for man is nothing more than a part of nature. Nature does not exist *for* man.

Naess sees and embraces the logical implication of his views: “*Biospherical egalitarianism—in principle*. . . . To the ecological field worker, *the equal right to live and blossom* is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom. Its restriction to humans is an anthropocentrism with detrimental effects upon the life quality of humans themselves.”<sup>11</sup> Or as Earth First! founder David Foreman puts it, “. . . man is no more important than any other species. . . . It may well take our extinction to set things straight.”<sup>12</sup>

With that admittedly brief and simplistic background sketch of deep ecology, let me turn now to more specific interaction with a particular representative of deep ecologist, neo-pagan thought. Sallie McFague, professor of theology and former dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School, has published quite a few highly influential books, including *Metaphorical Theology* (1982), *Models of God* (1987), which won the American Academy of Religion’s Award for Excellence, and *Super, Natural Christians* (1987). One of her most important books, however, is *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. In it, as one of its endorsers, Carol Adams (whom we met a little while ago as the author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*) puts it, “McFague weaves a unified vision of theology, joining what have been separated: body and soul, humans and the rest of nature, God and the earth. She invites us to think and act as if bodies matter for, as she shows, they do.”

In *The Body of God*, as you might expect, McFague presents a “model” in which the universe is literally that—the body of God. This model of immanence she opposes to the model of transcendence, in which God as Creator is entirely distinct from His creation and made it out of nothing. Her aim is to “balance the heavy transcendence of the Christian doctrine of God.” “What would it mean,” she asks, “to interpret creation as all the myriad forms of matter bodied forth from God and empowered with the breath of life, the spirit of God?” She says forthrightly that her

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<sup>9</sup>Naess, 31.

<sup>10</sup>Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 28.

<sup>11</sup>Naess, 28.

<sup>12</sup>Bidinotto, 414.

“organic model is . . . a fundamental way to reconceive Christian faith [and] an offering that Christianity can make to the planetary agenda of our time, the agenda that calls for all religions, nations, professions, and people to reconstruct their lives and their work to help our earth survive and prosper.”<sup>13</sup>

It is important to understand that for McFague and others like her, science and religion are intricately intertwined—but both science and religion get significantly redefined from what they had previously been understood to be. “The model of the world or universe as God’s body is . . . in keeping with the view of reality coming to us from contemporary science,” she writes. “It is a plausible theological response to that reality, a response that ought to make Christian interpretations of the relations between God and the world more credible than interpretations based on outmoded views of reality,” for, she adds, “the credibility of faith depends upon that connection” between theology and “the contemporary scientific picture of reality.”<sup>14</sup> One wonders, of course, why she bothers to call this model “Christian,” but let that go for the moment. It is also interesting that she employs the logical fallacy of *argumentum ab annis*, appeal to age (Christianity’s traditional view of God’s relation to the world is “outmoded”), when of course various “scientific” cosmologies are outmoded as well. Just in the twentieth century at least two major cosmologies came and went—the Steady State and Pulsating Universe views, both of which have been superseded by the Big Bang theory, which itself is being undermined at the cutting edge of theoretical physics. It is not only all flesh that is like grass, but also all scientific theories—yet the Word of the Lord endures for ever.

McFague suggests that “the primary belief of the Christian community, its doctrine of the incarnation (the belief that God is with us here on earth)”—and notice how she truncates the doctrine so as to make Jesus Christ incidental to it—“the primary belief of the Christian community, its doctrine of the incarnation . . . be radicalized beyond Jesus of Nazareth to include all matter.” “God is the breath or spirit,” she says, “that gives life to the billions of different bodies that make up God’s body. But God is also the source, power, and goal of everything that is, for the creation depends utterly upon God”<sup>15</sup>—but not, it should be noted, as, for instance, the weight of a pendulum depends on (literally, hangs from) the rod, but as I depend on I; if I didn’t exist, I wouldn’t exist. So also, the universe depends on God in that God simply is the universe; if God didn’t exist, the universe wouldn’t exist.

This model of the world as the body of God then serves an ethical and political agenda: “The liberating, healing, and inclusive ministry of Jesus that overturns hierarchical dualisms, heals sick bodies, and invites the outcast to the table should in our time be extended to a new poor–nature.”<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, this involves her in an explicit denial of the Biblical doctrine of

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<sup>13</sup>Sallie McFague, *The Body of god: An Ecological Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), vii-viii.

<sup>14</sup>McFague, ix-x.

<sup>15</sup>McFague, xi.

<sup>16</sup>McFague, xi-xii.



human dominion over the Earth: “we are not lords *over* the planet, but products of its processes; in fact, we are the product of a fifteen-billion-year history of the universe and a four-billion-year history of our earth. . . . The most important ecological knowledge we can have, then, is not how we can change the environment to suit us . . . but rather how we can adjust our desires and needs to what appear to be the house rules.”<sup>17</sup> This in turn leads her to assert that “restraint, doing less, pulling back, may be the better part of wisdom. . . . Not to act, but to abstain; not to control, but to ‘let be’; not to solve the problem, but to simplify one’s life; not to want more but to accept less; all this goes against the grain.”<sup>18</sup> Yet, paradoxically, she soon also writes that we must “refuse the role of victim, to become active, to participate in the vocation of the planetary agenda.”<sup>19</sup>

In the face of the “androcentric, hierarchical, dualistic models of God in the Christian tradition,” she, as “a feminist theologian” and now “an ecological theologian” is suggesting “alternatives.”<sup>20</sup> Ironically, it is traditional Christian theology that is least domineering in its method. That is, it bows to the authority of Scripture and seeks to set forth the model, the world view, the model, the world view, the theology there revealed. How unlike the domineering picture she gives of the traditional “androcentric, hierarchical” models!

McFague then contrasts two views of the universe, “an organic and a mechanical one, the world as body or machine.” The organic “model takes the perspective of the world as a whole and sees all parts, from the largest to the smallest, as interrelated and interdependent; the [mechanical model] takes the perspective of the parts and sees them related only in terms of the larger parts being dependent on or influenced by the smallest. The first has been called holistic, with top-down and bottom-up causation, while the second is called atomistic or reductionistic, with only bottom-up causation. Atomism, or the machine model, reduces all living things to their most basic chemical compounds . . . .”<sup>21</sup> Christianity, feminism, and ecology, she writes, tend to be ambivalent toward and even to abhor the body and must be corrected by the realization,

We do not *have* bodies, as we like to suppose, distancing ourselves from them as one does from an inferior, a servant, who works for us (the “us” being the mind that inhabits the body but does not really belong there). We *are* bodies, “body and soul.”<sup>22</sup> One of the most important revelations from postmodern science is the continuum between matter and energy (or, more precisely, the unified matter/energy field), which overturns traditional

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<sup>17</sup>McFague, 6.

<sup>18</sup>McFague, 6-7.

<sup>19</sup>McFague, 8.

<sup>20</sup>McFague, 13-14.

<sup>21</sup>McFague, 15.

<sup>22</sup>Just to be sure we don’t misunderstand her and think the phrase “body and soul” indicates some kind of distinction between the two (a “dualism” that she rejects), she later asks rhetorically, “what *are* we without our bodies?” (p. 19)—the obvious answer being *nothing*.

hierarchical dualisms such as nonliving/living, flesh/spirit, nature/human being . . . .  
 Whatever we say about that part of ourselves we call brain, mind, or spirit, it evolved from  
 and is continuous with our bodies.<sup>23</sup>

That is a rather interesting assertion. Not only, of course, does it reject the revelation of God in Scripture that to be “at home in the body” is to be “absent from the Lord” and “to be absent from the body” is “to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6, 8), and substitute for it other “revelations from postmodern science” (although it has been my sense that postmodern science doesn’t give but only deconstructs “revelations”), but also it makes quite a leap from the realization (not a part of postmodern but of Einsteinian science, by the way) that matter and energy are aspects of a unified field to the elimination of the immaterial soul from human nature. It is of course not at all clear how one can logically infer from “Matter and energy are a unified field” to “The soul is not distinct from the body,” the two propositions not sharing any of their four logical terms. But perhaps McFague would object to my insisting that her arguments should show some semblance of logic by saying that logic is masculine and hierarchical and she prefers the feminine and egalitarian. But let me return to sketching McFague’s thought.

She unfolds the implications of the “body of God” model of the universe by writing,

if we and everything else that exists in the universe are matter, are body, then can we also speak of “the body of God?” In fact, must we not do so? What would it mean to extend the model to God, the creator and redeemer of the universe? . . . What if we dared to think of our planet and indeed the entire universe as the body of God?

Since we now know that our bodies and spirits (or minds, souls) [Note that quick and subtle assertion, not argued but slipped in so quickly and naturally that we hardly notice that it affirms something antithetical to Biblical revelation.]—Since we now know that our bodies and spirits (or minds, souls) are on a continuum, is it so odd to think of God as embodied, since the Western tradition has always considered God in terms of personal agency (as having a will, mind, and spirit)? Remember that we are thinking analogically or metaphorically, that is, extrapolating from our own experience, what is familiar to us, in order to speak of what we cannot experience or know directly. We are not describing God as having a body or being embodied; we are suggesting that what is bedrock for the universe—*matter, that of which everything that is is made*—might be, in fact perhaps ought to be, applied to God as well.<sup>24</sup>

Notice carefully what McFague has just done. She has just asserted that matter is “that of which everything that is is made.” That implies that there is nothing but matter. That is precisely the view of Secular Humanism, of Marxist dialectical materialism. What it entails is that whenever

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<sup>23</sup>McFague, 16.

<sup>24</sup>McFague, 18-19, emphasis added.

McFague writes of “spirit” or “spirituality” or things’ being “spiritual,” she means something very different indeed from what anyone writing out of Biblical, Christian assumptions would mean. This is part of the trickiness of neo-paganism. It presents itself as a form of spirituality and as saying much about spirit and spirits, but in the final analysis it is only metaphysical materialism rechristened—and, as we shall see, shed of the Enlightenment rationality it borrowed from historic Christianity. For McFague, God is matter and matter is God. What meaning then is left to the words “God, the creator and redeemer of the universe”? Nothing.

Notice also a tactic McFague has used, and see if you don’t recognize in it someone else’s tactic. “Is it so odd to think of God as embodied?” she asks. “What if we dared to think . . .?” And she goes on to ask, “Is it an impossible, abhorrent, or obscene thought? Should it be discarded out of hand? Or is it an interesting, inviting, provocative thought, and one that, as we have tried to show, has at least ambivalent credentials in Christianity, feminism, and ecology?”<sup>25</sup> Do we not hear the echo of an ancient voice asking, “Hath God said?” Are we not reminded of Eve, knowing what God had said (for she had corrected the serpent!), nonetheless looking at the fruit and asking herself, “Is it not good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise?” Like the serpent of old, McFague appeals precisely to the drive for the novel, the titillating, the risky. And that happens to be an important element of how neo-paganism appeals to modern Americans.

But to return to McFague’s focus: “what is bedrock for the universe—*matter, that of which everything that is is made*—might be, in fact perhaps ought to be, applied to God as well.” That is, for McFague God, like human beings, is nothing but matter. “As the embodied spirit of all that is, God would be closer to us than we are to ourselves, for God would be the very breath of our breath.” This sounds suddenly as if she has reversed herself. Maybe God as “the embodied spirit” *is* distinct from the material world after all? No. “In this body model, God would not be transcendent over the universe in the sense of external to or apart from, but would be”—note now that she is going to give her definition of God and her definition of spirit—God “would be the source, power, and goal—the spirit—that enlivens (and loves) the entire process and its material forms.”<sup>26</sup> So when McFague writes of God or spirit, she means the “source, power, and goal . . . that enlivens (and loves) the entire process and its material forms.” Whatever else this might be, it is most certainly not Christian theism. It is instead simple pantheism.

It is important, too, to note how McFague reaches her views about God. She moves from “postmodern” science’s revelations of the matter/energy continuum to the view of humans as solely material to the view that God, too, is solely material—that what we have meant all along by saying we are embodied spirits is that we are matter in which processes occur. “As we are inspirited bodies—living, loving, thinking bodies—so, imagining God in our image (for how else *can*

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<sup>25</sup>McFague, 19.

<sup>26</sup>McFague, 20.

we model God?), we speak of her as *the* inspirited body of the entire universe, the animating, living spirit that produces, guides, and saves all that is.”<sup>27</sup> Of course, if God has not spoken, if Scripture is not His Self-revelation, we can do no better than to reason from ourselves to Him. But as Francis Schaeffer put it, He is there, and He is not silent.

What does this great exchange of historic Christian theology and anthropology for the new theology and anthropology of neo-pagan pantheism achieve for us? What is its payoff? How is it good for food, a delight to the eyes, desirable to make one wise? “There is one obvious advantage to this model,” McFague writes: “it allows us to think of God as immanent in our world while retaining, indeed, magnifying God’s transcendence. The model of the universe as God’s body unites immanence and transcendence.”<sup>28</sup> Really? Is that so? Rather, it collapses God’s transcendence into His immanence. If matter is all that is, and if God is inspirited body, and if spirit is nothing but “the source, power, and goal . . . that enlivens (and loves) the entire process and its material forms,” then God is not in fact transcendent at all, regardless what McFague claims. Here is the irrationalism, the self-refutation, of postmodernism and neo-paganism: “Immanent transcendence or transcendent immanence is what the model of the universe as God’s body implies, and it is,” McFague says, “what Christian incarnationism implies as well.”<sup>29</sup> She might just as well write of “black whiteness” or “positive negativeness” or “false truth.” Self-contradiction, the height of irrationality, is inherent in pantheism and consequently also in neo-paganism. No wonder, then, that she soon repeats one of the mantras of all pantheistic mysticism: “No human words can describe God,”<sup>30</sup> which of course means “God is something human words cannot describe,” which is self-refuting.

After so carefully constructing this ambitious (but by no means novel) model, McFague seemingly backs off, saying that “it will invite us to imagine boldly and radically while insisting that models do not provide descriptions. . . . Many other models exist, some mutually exclusive of the body model, others complementary to it, and still others that correct its biases and partiality. . . . Metaphors and models are *not* descriptions, and, to the degree we keep this in mind, we will be open to experience the potential insights they can offer us.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, it seems, McFague doesn’t claim that any of this is *true*, only that it is a *model*, and contradictory and complementary models exist, too, and none of them is true, either—but then neither are any false. In the final analysis, *all* thoughts are only models, and *nothing* is true—one more instance of the self-refutation of non-Christian thought.

I am about ready to turn now from McFague and her neo-pagan pantheist model of God and the world to look at last at global warming hysteria, but before I do I think it will be helpful to

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<sup>27</sup>McFague, 20.

<sup>28</sup>McFague, 20.

<sup>29</sup>McFague, 21.

<sup>30</sup>McFague, 23.

<sup>31</sup>McFague, 22.

point out two other things: first, an instance (among many) of how her relativism can become the platform for vehement judgments of those who disagree with her, and second, the degree to which she makes theology subservient to contemporary science.

Near the close of the chapter from which most of this discussion is taken, she writes,

A society that . . . refuses in international congresses to join other nations in protecting biodiversity and limiting chemicals that contribute to global warming . . . hates the body, human bodies, and all other animal and plant bodies that make up the body of our planet.<sup>32</sup>

That is, if you dare to disagree with her empirical claims about the environment and what needs to be done about it, you are full of hate. So much for the non-hierarchical, cooperative character of postmodern, neo-pagan environmentalism!

Near the start of the next chapter, on cosmology, in which she compares the organic, “world as the body of God” model with the mechanistic model of the universe (which she calls the “classic” model, namely, the Big Bang followed by cosmic and biotic evolution), McFague writes, “Theologies always have paid and always should pay serious attention to the picture of reality operative in their culture. If they do not, theology becomes anachronistic and irrelevant.”<sup>33</sup> In an endnote supporting the final comment, she cites Wolfhart Pannenberg, who bemoaned Karl Barth’s “decision ‘in principle’ that a theological doctrine of creation should not concern itself with scientific descriptions of the world”: “If theologians want to conceive of God as the creator of the real world, they cannot possibly bypass the scientific description of that real world,”<sup>34</sup> said Pannenberg, correcting Barth. But while we may embrace Pannenberg’s rejection of Barth’s upper storey/lower storey dualism that put the *Geschichte* of faith in the upper storey and the *Historie* of reality in the lower storey, never the twain to meet, we must equally reject Pannenberg’s—and McFague’s—enslavement of theology to the fleeting claims of science. As I noted previously, the last century alone saw the rise of three and fall of two major scientific cosmologies, and we are observing the collapse of the third in our own time. It is unclear yet what will replace it. But with the historic inability of science to tell a consistent story even through a few decades, let alone a few millennia, theology need make no apologies for standing firmly on the axioms of Scripture and saying, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn” (Isaiah 8:20).

I have come nearly full circle. We began with a vignette of my encounter with Mary Evelyn Tucker, the neo-pagan eco-feminist Yale theologian who took such offense at my pointing out in my Vatican paper that it is rather disconcerting when people make up their minds before seeing the evidence and then, challenged, simply deny that the evidence exists. The tactic is not

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<sup>32</sup>McFague, 24.

<sup>33</sup>McFague, 28-9.

<sup>34</sup>McFague, 221, n. 5.

surprising. The irrationalism of pantheism, of neo-paganism, of postmodernism, and indeed of modernist materialism itself, none of which can support truth claims, because none can provide axioms—unlike the epistemology of Biblical revelationism—that irrationalism has raised its head repeatedly in the debate—no, that is too dignified a word for it—the verbal conflagration over catastrophic, manmade global warming and other environmental crises. I have been called, by a prominent leader of the evangelical environmental movement in the mid-1990s, Gordon Aeschliman, a racist, a sexist, and a hater of the poor because I questioned the reality or magnitude of various environmental problems, including global warming. Aeschliman awarded *World* magazine and me the “Toxic Turkey” award for our article exposing some of the false claims in the Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation and successfully persuading many Christian leaders not to endorse it. Critics of global warming alarmism are now routinely called “deniers”—the comparison with Holocaust deniers intentional. Some have called for Nuremberg-style trials for the “deniers” for having committed a crime against humanity—nay, against the whole Earth. Critics of global warming alarmism routinely face charges that they and their opinions are bought and paid for by industry (their accusers forgetting that somebody pays the scientists who make the opposite claims, too). And the first response to almost anyone who dares to challenge the global warming dogma is almost always, “But an overwhelming scientific consensus affirms this claim”—as if consensus were relevant to science, when instead, as the great sociologist of science Robert K. Merton put it in 1938, “Most institutions demand unqualified faith; but the institution of science makes skepticism a virtue.”<sup>35</sup> I might point out, however, that as study after study either reduces the magnitude of estimated human contribution to global warming or enlarges the magnitude of the estimated contribution of other factors—cycles of solar energy and solar wind output, long-term cycles of ocean/atmosphere circulations, cycles in Earth’s tilt and rotation around the sun, even changes in Earth’s position relative to the arms of the Milky Way and consequently cycles in the intensity of cosmic rays entering Earth’s atmosphere—as study after study reduces human influence and enhances natural influence on global climate change,<sup>36</sup> the wheels are coming off the consensus bandwagon (the consensus itself never having been successfully documented before anyway).

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<sup>35</sup>Robert K. Merton, “Science and the Social Order,” *Philosophy of Science* 5:3 (July 1938), 321-337, at 334.

<sup>36</sup>While I mention a few such studies below, many more could be mentioned. Many are referenced in The Cornwall Alliance’s “A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming,” at [http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/Call\\_to\\_Truth.pdf](http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/Call_to_Truth.pdf), which has been endorsed by over 170 leaders, including scores of climate scientists and environmental economists (listed at [http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/Open\\_Letter.pdf](http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/Open_Letter.pdf)), and in my “Global Warming: Why Evangelicals Should Not Be Alarmed,” (<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/Global-Warming-Why-evangelicals-should-not-be-alarmed.pdf>), “Important Developments on Global Warming in 2006” (<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/articles/read/important-developments-on-global-warming-in-2006>), and “Scientific Orthodoxies, Politicized Science, and Catastrophic Global Warming: Challenges to Evangelicals Navigating Rough Waters in Science and Policy,” presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 2006, Washington, D.C. (<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/articles/read/scientific-orthodoxies-politicized-science-and-catastrophic-global-warming/>), and in issues of The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation’s newsletter, some back issues of which are available at [www.cornwallalliance.org](http://www.cornwallalliance.org), where one can also subscribe online.

Because the idea of overwhelming scientific consensus is so widespread, in part because Al Gore so constantly proclaims it and gets sycophantic media coverage, let me address that matter in a little more detail. A study published in *Science* in 2004 claimed to have found that no papers in a large database of refereed publications from 1993 through 2003 rejected what the author called the consensus that “[m]ost of the observed warming over the last 50 years is likely to have been due to the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations” (IPCC, 2001). But another scholar, attempting to replicate the results, discovered serious flaws in the study’s method and concluded that no such consensus existed in the refereed literature. A new study of the same database, this time covering the period 2004 through early 2007, found that the proportion of scientific papers endorsing the “consensus” had fallen, while the proportion rejecting it had risen. This result suggested “a significant movement of scientific opinion *away from* the apparently unanimous consensus which [the author of the 2004 study] had found . . . from 1993 to 2003.”<sup>37</sup>

A 2003 survey of climate scientists asked, “To what extent do you agree or disagree that climate change is mostly the result of anthropogenic [manmade] causes?” Of the 530 valid responses, 9.4 percent strongly agreed, while 9.7 percent strongly disagreed. A much more extensive survey reported in 2007 found little support for the claim of consensus and concluded, “the matter is far from being settled in the scientific arena.” These results suggest that among climatologists consensus is not strong that climate change is mostly caused by human activities.<sup>38</sup> In late 2007 one hundred prominent scientists, most working in fields dealing with climate change, signed an open letter to U.N. Secretary General Ban K-Moon saying that climate change is largely natural cannot be stopped by human action and that adaptation is a better response than attempting to prevent it. A week later, a report of the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works listed over 400 prominent scientists who disputed man-made global warming, many of them involved in the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).<sup>39</sup>

Let me conclude, though, by referring again to Sallie McFague’s concession that her idea of the world as the body of God is only a “model” and that models do not describe. That points to one of the most significant elements of the controversy about manmade, catastrophic warming.

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<sup>37</sup>Naomi Oreskes, “The scientific consensus on climate change,” *Science*, vol. 306, issue 5702 (December 3, 2004), 1686, online at <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/306/5702/1686>; Benny J. Peiser, Letter to *Science*, January 4, 2005, submission ID: 56001, online at [www.staff.livjm.ac.uk/spsbpeis/Scienceletter.htm](http://www.staff.livjm.ac.uk/spsbpeis/Scienceletter.htm); Klaus-Martin Schulte, “Scientific Consensus on Climate Change?” prepublication draft for *Energy and Environment*, vol. 19, no. 2.

<sup>38</sup>Letter from Dennis Bray to *Science* magazine, December 22, 2004, online at <http://www.staff.livjm.ac.uk/spsbpeis/Scienceletter.htm>; D. Bray and H. von Storch, *The Perspectives of Climate Scientists on Global Change* (GKSS Forschungszentrum, 2007), online at [http://dvsun3.gkss.de/BERICHTE/GKSS\\_Berichte\\_2007/GKSS\\_2007\\_11.pdf](http://dvsun3.gkss.de/BERICHTE/GKSS_Berichte_2007/GKSS_2007_11.pdf).

<sup>39</sup>Open Letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, December 13, 2007, online at [http://scienceandpublicpolicy.org/images/stories/papers/reprint/UN\\_open\\_letter.pdf](http://scienceandpublicpolicy.org/images/stories/papers/reprint/UN_open_letter.pdf); “U.S. Senate Report: Over 400 Prominent Scientists Disputed Man-Made Global Warming in 2007,” online at <http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=MinoritySenateReport>.

Those who promote the “conventional wisdom”—recent warming is largely manmade and is already, or is likely soon to become, catastrophic—are mostly computer modelers. Those who reject that view are mostly data gatherers. In their most candid moments, the modelers know the models do not *describe* and cannot properly be used to *predict* future temperatures.<sup>40</sup> They know the models fail even to retrodict past climate without multiple and enormous *ad hoc* adjustments. Yet they cling to their scenarios and insist that governments the world over commit trillions of dollars to policies predicated on them. The data gatherers, meanwhile, point out instance after instance in which the data contradict the models. It has become a commonplace in the discussion that the fit between rising atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration and rising global temperature is very poor—indeed, over long periods carbon dioxide follows temperature rather than vice versa, and in the past century and a half temperature has risen and fallen erratically while carbon dioxide has risen on a fairly smooth hyperbolic curve—while the fit between temperature and sunspot cycles (which are closely related to cycles in solar energy and solar wind output) is very tight.<sup>41</sup> In the summer of 2006 Danish physicist Henrik Svensmark and colleagues published research not only showing that there is an extremely tight correlation between changes in solar wind output and global temperature but also explaining how the solar wind changes affect temperature—namely, by changing the rate of cosmic ray influx into the atmosphere and thus changing the rate of cloud formation, which is heavily determined by cosmic ray concentration.<sup>42</sup> The Danish researchers, along with others in Israel and America who have cooperated in or duplicated their work, estimate that this influence alone could explain from 75 percent to nearly all of the climate change recorded in the past century and a half. In August of 2007 University of Alabama senior research climatologist and Cornwall Alliance contributing scientist Roy Spencer and colleagues published the results of six years’ study of data from NASA satellites showing that tropical cirrus clouds, which trap low-level heat, diminish rather than increasing with increased surface temperature, making them a negative rather than a positive feedback on surface warming—precisely opposite the assumption of *every* general circulation model used by the climate modelers.<sup>43</sup> “To give an idea of how strong this enhanced cooling mechanism is,” Spencer explains, “if it was operating on global warming, it would reduce estimates of future warming by over 75%.”<sup>44</sup> In December another University of Alabama senior climatologist, John Christy, and co-authors published the results of additional research from NASA satellites showing that, although every global climate model predicts that warming generated by rising carbon dioxide

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<sup>40</sup>Myanna Lahsen, “Seductive Simulations? Uncertainty Distribution Around Climate Models,” *Social Studies of Science* 35/6 (December 2005), 895-922, online at [http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/admin/publication\\_files/resource-1891-2005.49.pdf#search=%22%22Myanna%20Lahsen%22%20%22Seductive%20Simulations%22%22](http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/admin/publication_files/resource-1891-2005.49.pdf#search=%22%22Myanna%20Lahsen%22%20%22Seductive%20Simulations%22%22).

<sup>41</sup>Figure, “Causes of Climate Change,” from Fris-Christensen & Lassen, 1991, *Science* 254 #5032, adapted by Tim Patterson, online at <http://friendsofscience.org/>.

<sup>42</sup>Henrik Svensmark and Nigel Calder, *The Chilling Stars: A New Theory of Climate Change* (Cambridge, UK: Totem Books, 2006).

<sup>43</sup>Roy W. Spencer, William D. Braswell, John R. Christy, and Justin Hnilo, “Cloud and radiation budget changes associated with tropical interseasonal oscillations,” *Geophysical Research Letters* 34 L15707 (August 9, 2007).

<sup>44</sup>University of Alabama press release at [www.uah.edu/news/newsread.php?newsID=875](http://www.uah.edu/news/newsread.php?newsID=875), and [www.blogs.usatoday.com/weather/2007/08/cloudy-forecast.html](http://www.blogs.usatoday.com/weather/2007/08/cloudy-forecast.html).



would be greatest in the tropical troposphere, that signal of anthropogenic warming is simply non-existent in the hard data—which makes it extremely unlikely that rising carbon dioxide is causing global warming.<sup>45</sup> And in the same month University of Guelph economist and Cornwall contributing scholar Ross McKittrick and colleagues published a very important paper demonstrating that the formulae used by climate modelers to adjust surface temperature readings to filter out the urban heat island effect were wrong by so much that, after correction, the apparent post-1980 increase in global temperature must be cut in half, with the result that the warming rate over the period no longer differs from the wholly natural rates of previous periods, and its evidentiary role in the argument for manmade warming disappears.<sup>46</sup> These are just a handful of many findings reported in peer-reviewed articles over the past three years that thoroughly undermine the catastrophic manmade warming scenario. I have reported on many others in the newsletter of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation (to which you can subscribe at [www.cornwallalliance.org](http://www.cornwallalliance.org)) and in papers posted at our website.

It is a symptom of the postmodernist epistemology of much of the environmentalist movement, including the evangelical environmentalist movement, that it fails to recognize that models do not describe—and fails to recognize the enormous failures of the General Circulation Models that underlie the catastrophist claims. (As an aside here, let me remark on the influence of neo-pagan, New Age spirituality on so-called “evangelical” environmentalism. NAE Vice President for Governmental Affairs Rich Cizik, who has become a prominent leader in the evangelical movement for global warming alarmism, and Jim Ball, president of the Evangelical Environmental Network and another prominent proponent, both testify, as do many signers of the Evangelical Climate Initiative, that it was the influence of professed British evangelical climatologist Sir John Houghton that converted them to belief in catastrophic manmade warming. I have read Houghton’s *Global Warming: The Complete Briefing*, including the chapter in which he discusses his religious views and purports to give evidence for his evangelicalism. The two most frequently cited sources in that chapter are Al Gore’s *Earth in the Balance*, which is loaded with New Age thought, and New Age scientist/guru James Lovelock’s *The Ages of Gaia*. Houghton’s use of Scripture is scanty and superficial. There is simply no evidence in that chapter that he is evangelical. He may be, but if he is, his evangelicalism seems to have had little impact on his world view and understanding of how it ought to influence his science. Now, to return from this aside:) It is ironic that the same people who embrace postmodern science also fail to embrace the view of many physicists that by the very nature of the types of differential equations involved,

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<sup>45</sup>David H. Douglass, John R. Christy, Benjamin D. Pearson, and S. Fred Singer, “A comparison of tropical temperature trends with model predictions,” *International Journal of Climatology* (2007), online at [http://scienceandpublicpolicy.org/images/stories/papers/other/Singer\\_model\\_wrong.pdf](http://scienceandpublicpolicy.org/images/stories/papers/other/Singer_model_wrong.pdf).

<sup>46</sup>Ross McKittrick and Patrick Michaels, “Quantifying the influence of anthropogenic surface processes and inhomogeneities on gridded global climate data,” *Journal of Geophysical Research*, vol. 112, DS24S09, doi:10.1029/2007JD008465, 2007, online at <http://www.uoguelph.ca/~rmckitri/research/jgr07/M&M.JGRDec07.pdf>. For a non-technical explanation of the research and its implications by co-author McKittrick, see <http://www.uoguelph.ca/~rmckitri/research/jgr07/M&M.JGR07-background.pdf>.

many elements of the incredibly complex land/ocean/atmosphere circulation system, a fluid dynamic system every bit as chaotic as that of subatomic physics, are outside the realm of possible human knowledge, and that therefore it is in principle impossible to support the kinds of predictions warming alarmists routinely make.<sup>47</sup> The delight many evangelicals have shown in chaos theory and quantum physics at the micro level, some of them even extrapolating improperly from it to postmodern physics and relativism, fails to apply to chaos theory at the macro level of global climate, though it is equally justified there.

In the final analysis, the findings of science are shifting and temporary. The Word of the Lord endures forever. And He is the One who swore to Himself, “I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night Shall not cease” (Genesis 8:20-21). Cursed is the one who trusts in man. Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.

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<sup>47</sup>See Christopher Essex and Ross McKittrick, *Taken By Storm: The Troubled Science, Politics and Policy of Global Warming*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2008). The famed Italian physicist Antonini Zichichi made the same point in his paper presented to the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace in April 2007.