

Reformed Perspectives on Climate Science

From Dr David Golding CBE, Newcastle University

Dear Sir,

I was surprised at the characterisation of the current debate about climate change as "largely atheistic" (Michael Walker, March). In 1960, the eminent evangelical scientist, Professor Donald MacKay, said that, "The dispute between Science and Christianity deserved to die, because it was really between mistaken views of each". Clearly, the obituary was somewhat premature! In fact, most scientists would not describe themselves in this way, and many are believers. Indeed, one of our greatest climate scientists, Professor Sir John Houghton FRS, is an evangelical Christian. Anyway, if a heart specialist said Mr Walker was suffering from, say, angina, would he reject the diagnosis as being "atheistic"?

More important, this is emphatically not the reformed position! As Prof MacKay stated, "It has never been doubted by orthodox Christians that the same God was the author of true discoveries in the Book of Nature as well as in the Book of Scripture". This applies even when the discoveries are made by unbelievers. In his *Institutes* Calvin asserted: "We hold the Spirit of God to be the only source of truth wherever it may reveal itself" and warned that we should not reject it, "provided we do not wish to offend the Spirit".

Mr Walker complains that "Christians... are adding little that is distinctly theistic" to the scientific debate, but this too is misguided. Professor Reijer Hooykaas, the great Dutch science historian, said that someone trying to build a 'Christian' science "is acting like a man who hunts for his spectacles while they are on his nose"! Why? Because "modern science to a great extent is a fruit of Christianity" and its view of the world and mankind. Even T.H. Huxley admitted this: "Sit down before fact like a little child; this is the lesson Christianity has taught us." So the theism is right there, embedded in the warp and weave of the scientific method!

I am deeply saddened to see so many Christians repeating the error described by Francis Bacon, the 'father' of modern science (and a believer): "We will have it that all things are as in our folly we think they should be... not as they are found to be in fact... Wherefore, not undeservedly, our dominion over creation is a second time forfeited". As far as climate science is concerned, whose fundamentals are immensely robust, could it be that we do this because its implication for our lifestyles is 'an inconvenient truth'?

Note: those wishing to know more of this subject should consult "Global Warming, Climate Change and Sustainability", by Sir John Houghton FRS. Go to www.jri.org.uk/brief/Briefing_14_3rd_edition.pdf My own "Climate Change - A brief outline of the strength of the scientific consensus" is available at www.mph-northeast.org.uk