

# **CLIMATE CHANGE? – God’s plan or man’s exploitation?**

## **Exploring the Christian Ethics of Climate Change**

Much has been written in the last few days concerning Climate Change and the question of whether or not this is the direct result of the activity of Mankind through the burning of fossil fuels.

Leaving aside the controversy of the debate on just who is responsible, as Christians we can at the least agree to discuss the ethics that lie behind many of the policies that are being introduced under the broad heading of “Green Initiatives.”

Take for instance the promotion of Solar Panels on our rooftops. At first sight this appears to be an admirable way to help clean up the environment, the generation of electrical energy using quite simple and reliable devices. In order to encourage this programme our Government has agreed to pay the householder a large subsidy in the form of income derived from the supply of surplus energy from such roof panels, into the National Grid. When first introduced the scale of subsidy was something in the order of 41 pence per kWh, compared to the normal householder cost of 12 pence per kWh. In other words the householder was able to put some 29 pence per kWh into their pockets to offset the cost of installing the panels on their roofs. The payback period to recover these installation costs varied from household to household, but has been in the region of 8 to 10 years, though that figure is now changing.

Several Churches have, in their concern for the Environment, proceeded to also install solar panels on their Church Roofs. In most instances the subsidies that are received are paid direct into general Church Funds.

Therein lies a question of ethics that such an action raises. After all the “Green Subsidy” received is not simply the action of a generous government, but is actually paid for by, the income generated from taxing all of us, coupled with additional costs on our bills recovered by the Utility supplier who is supplying us with power. The latter cost is now, using the government’s own figures, in the order of an additional £300 per annum on an average household bill.

This therefore implies that Churches which install Solar Panels and who do not pay the subsidy that they receive from surplus power they add to the Grid, into some charitable fund, are actually being subsidised by all taxpayers, including

those people who do not own a roof. This is especially tough on the most vulnerable in our society.

Moving on to other ethical concerns we run up against schemes for the construction of Solar Farms, in which huge numbers of Solar Panels are installed on large open spaces of land which have previously been utilised for agricultural purposes. An example of one such scheme is that being proposed by Peterborough City Council, where 5 tenant farmers occupying 900 acres of land are to be evicted so that 500,000 glass panels and several wind turbines can be installed over an area equivalent to 700 football pitches.

Precious agricultural land being lost to “Green Energy Initiatives”, do not stop at the construction of a project, such as those detailed above, which are hailed as beneficial because such projects provide some employment. The agricultural industry itself has, in its search for growth and profit, turned to crops which are being grown in order to produce a vegetable oil, which is then converted into fuel to power our vehicles. As a result the demand for wheat to make bread increases, as does the cost of our food. Meanwhile half the world is starving!

Finally we turn to the ethics involved in so called Carbon Trading. According to a report in the Financial Times last November, written by Jim Pickard and Ajay Makan, “at least 10 London banks have scaled back or closed their carbon trading desks amid turmoil in the European emissions trading scheme. Under the trading scheme, companies buy and sell permits that each give the right to emit a tonne of carbon without penalty.

This was supposed to provide a powerful economic incentive for industries to cut the greenhouse gas emissions blamed for climate change, but the price of a permit has fallen persistently because there are too many permits in the system – reducing the cost pressure on polluters.”

In addition, the News Agency Reuters reported in November 2013 that “The government has begun compensating companies for the indirect costs of the European Union Emissions Trading System (ETS) ... To date a total of 16 million pounds (\$25.7 million) has been paid to 17 companies in the UK,” a spokeswoman from the Department of Energy and Climate Change said via email.

Companies that have received cash so far include Tata Steel, Celsa Steel and chemical firm Ineos Chlor Vinyls, she said, without revealing how much each firm was awarded.

The government wants to limit the impact of new rules under the EU ETS, which from this year force most power generators to pay for carbon permits rather than receive them for free, and has set aside 113 million pounds to cover compensation.”

So here we have a tax imposed by the EU which directly threatens large UK Manufacturing Companies and therefore employment, which the UK Government has therefore decided to pay in order not to see these Companies relocating overseas. Note, however, that despite the payment of “fines,” there is in most cases actually very little, if any, reduction in Carbon Emissions! The question for us as Christians to consider is that if such a Trading System is not working, how else can the current compensation in the UK of £113 Million be spent and who should be the beneficiaries?

In total our government awards some £7.6 Billion in Green Subsidies. This money is paid out on schemes which have ethical concerns for all of us. As Christians we should be asking questions about the need for such subsidies and if not paid out for some questionable Green Initiatives, could be put to direct immediate use to help the vulnerable in our society and especially those in other countries who are dying from starvation, and a lack of basic medical care.

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