

# Recycling the Planet

by: Ronald L. Dart

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Are you losing confidence in your news media—newspapers, news magazines, television news programs? The first thing you should know about any news medium—*Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times*—it's a business. It exists to make money for the people who own it and control it. The second thing you should know is that none of them is politically neutral. They all have an axe to grind of one kind or another. You know how it is in the world: the people who have the money get to make and shape the opinions of people who don't. They may be Democrats or Republicans, but one thing your journalists are not: they are not impartial. Fox News likes to boast about being fair and balanced, but it doesn't mean they're impartial. It simply means that they try to get an equal number of idiots from each end of the political spectrum and, the further out on either wing of the spectrum, the better. They are in business to make money and making money depends on advertising revenue. Advertising revenue depends on how many people are actually watching the show. Thus, Fox likes noisy confrontations. No one has hit anyone yet on Fox News—at least I haven't seen it—but that's a small comfort. You may occasionally find yourself wishing someone would. At least it would clear the air and help people understand what's going on. Even PBS, which is theoretically non-commercial, is a long way from being non-partisan.

Now, am I suggesting that newsmen, journalists, lie? Of course they do. They ignore news they don't like. They play up news that fits their worldview and their view of the way things ought to be. Isn't that lying? They make up stories if they don't have one. Isn't that lying? The CBS debacle sometime back over George W. Bush's record in the Air National Guard should be exhibit one. Those who want to give CBS the benefit of the doubt conclude that the staff wanted the story to be true so badly that they passed over their normal fact checking, whatever that might be. Politicians lie; newsmen lie. Now I understand why King David once said, "I said in my haste, 'all men are liars.'" I just don't know if he was all that hasty. What this means is, you really can't believe anything anyone says.

Here we sit, smack dab in the middle of the information age, awash in information, and we can't trust the information we are getting. Frankly, this is dangerous. A free press is essential to a democratic society, but for the press to remain free it has to be truthful. When the gentlemen of the press no longer have the courage to tell the truth no matter where it leads, we are headed for a catastrophic loss of freedom. And we may already be further down that road than we realize. What got me thinking about this was the headline on the cover of the April 3, 2006 issue of *Time Magazine*, trumpeting a special report on global warming: "Be Worried. Be Very Worried." Now that's an inflammatory cover. It showed a polar bear on an ice floe with water all around. The implication was that the poor bear was going to drown in all this warm water as a result of global warming. The articles and the graphics in the magazine are carefully designed to scare the bejeebers out of the readers. They are also designed to sell magazines and make money. They can't just put out a boring cover and say, "Some scientists say the world is getting warmer and some say it's not, but it doesn't matter." Can't do that. That wouldn't sell any magazines.

*U.S. News* also had an argument—an article I should say—blowing the warning horn on global warming. They featured a graph that resembled a hockey stick. Visualize a hockey stick lying with the long handle slowly inclining and a sharp upturn at the end of the stick. It showed global temperature patterns for the past thousand years. Naturally, global temperature varies year by year, but in the estimates they showed—mind you, nobody was taking the temperature of the globe until some time after 1800—the average global temperature declined slowly over that thousand year period until about a hundred years ago. Then the graph showed it spiking up alarmingly. It's alarming, until you look at the left side of the graph and notice the scale. The scale of that huge spike amounts to an increase of 1° Fahrenheit over the past one hundred years. The scale of the rise is less than 1° Fahrenheit over the past thousand years. And they want me to be scared about this.

George Well was not amused by this story. He searched for the facts and here's what he found. *Science* magazine, December 10, 1976, warned of "extensive northern hemisphere glaciation." In other words, we were in danger of having another Ice Age. *Science Digest*, February 1973, reported: "The world's climatologists are agreed that we must prepare for the next Ice Age." *Christian Science Monitor*: "Warning! The earth's climate is changing faster than even the experts expect." They reported that glaciers had begun to advance. Growing seasons in England and Scandinavia were getting shorter. And the North Atlantic was cooling down about as fast as an ocean

can. Spooky. *Newsweek* magazine chimed in with “The Cooling World” article, April 28, 1975: “Meteorologists are almost unanimous that catastrophic famines might result from the global cooling that the *New York Times* said in September of that year ‘we might return to another Ice Age.’” *Time*, May 21, 1975, also said: “A major cooling of the climate is widely considered inevitable now that it is well established that the North Hemisphere climate has been getting cooler since about 1950.” I remember all that hype and I remember being worried about it. I was worried; I was very worried.

What if we had all run out, bought and burned more gasoline, and tried to reverse the trend? They’re telling us today that we need to buy less gasoline, use more gasoline-efficient cars, and thereby reverse global warming. For all I know, the news media may be responsible for all those SUVs on the road, trying desperately to keep the planet from another Ice Age. Now, here’s my question: are *Time* and *U.S. News* prepared to buy up all those SUVs they caused us to buy in an effort to stem the tide on global cooling? I hope you’ll forgive me a little sarcasm. What I thought amazing in that litany of information was the warning about catastrophic famines resulting from global cooling. Now we face droughts, and famine, and global warming.

All that was just about thirty years ago. I mean, can’t we ask for a little sanity from somewhere? George Well has a remarkable knack for clarity; he put his finger on the problem. He said, “In fact, the Earth is always experiencing either warming or cooling. But suppose the scientists and their journalistic conduits, who today say they were so spectacularly wrong so recently, are now correct. Suppose the Earth is warming and suppose the warming is caused by human activity. Are we sure there will be proportionate benefits from whatever climate change can be purchased at the cost of slowing economic growth and spending trillions of dollars? Are we sure the consequences of climate change—remember, a thick sheet of ice once covered the Midwest—have to be bad? Or has the science-journalism complex decided that debate about these questions, too, is ‘over’? About the mystery that vexes ABC—why have Americans been slow to get in lock step concerning global warming?—perhaps the problem is not big oil or big coal, both of which have discovered there is big money to be made from tax breaks and other subsidies justified in the name of combating carbon. Perhaps the problem is big crusading journalism.” I think I’m going to make room on my shelf alongside “Big Oil”, alongside “Big Pharmaceuticals,” alongside “Big Government,” and a whole lot of other “Bigs,” for “Big Journalism” because they

may be as dangerous as the huge military industrial complex so many in Hollywood worry themselves sick over.

Okay...what can you do, anyway, about the problem—besides being worried. . . very worried? Well, you could trade in your big SUV, your big gas guzzler, for a small hybrid car. But the problem then is, you might be driving through an intersection on your way to work tomorrow, get slammed by your old SUV being driven by somebody else, and be killed. The gain to the planet would be imperceptible, but the loss to your family would be catastrophic. I got a better idea and I got it from *Time* magazine. They told how the rock band, Coldplay, made a new CD a while ago. To offset carbon dioxide produced in marketing and selling their album, they bought 10,000 mango trees for villagers in India. The idea was, since trees breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen, the trees would offset carbon dioxide pollution created from their album. They didn't say anything about the cultural pollution, but. . . never mind. They gave me an idea—a better idea I think. I'm not going to renew my subscription to my news magazines. Who knows how many trees I can save. If we all cancelled our subscriptions, think of all those trees that would still be breathing in CO<sub>2</sub> and breathing out oxygen. Why, we might even be able to restore global cooling.

Let's see if I can get this thing into some kind of perspective. It isn't easy with "Big Journalism" out there, but maybe we can see this thing a little more clearly. First, let's agree on one thing—the Earth we walk on is a temporary phenomenon in space. It wasn't here four billion years ago and it won't be here a few billion years from now. You know, we have been lucky to be living when we are. We have had the advantage of all the growth and development over the past years but, presumably, we won't still be around when things go sour. Our descendants will not be so lucky. They will face the end of life on the planet well before the end of the planet itself. At the end, our sun will become a red giant as it burns out its fuel. Its radius will extend well beyond the orbit of the inner planets. Long before this happens, the surface of the earth will be carbonized, burnt to a crisp. After that, the planet itself will begin to resemble its core—it will melt. Our planet will be recycled.

The universe has a way of doing this without consultation, without worrying about who gets hurt in the process. All those people in favor of recycling, who want to save up old phone books, old beer cans, melt it all down, and recycle it to use over again, be of good cheer. The whole planet is going to be recycled. And don't worry. . . humankind is not going to jet off into space and migrate to another planet. Space is too big; the physics of it are too unyielding. Let's face it: humankind is simply going to die. Actually, no one believes it will be billions of years before that starts to happen. Whether you are a scientist or a theologian you know this. I'm not sure when science first came to understand the age of the earth, its origins, and its eventual demise, but a quick search suggests that it was little more than fifty years ago. So science knows the earth won't be here forever. Religion knows it too. Two thousand years ago, the Apostle Peter wrote this: ". . . the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly." That's a pretty accurate description of what science tells us will happen. The earth being on fire will melt with fervent heat. How did Peter know that? Well, it's not that hard. He put it together from divine revelation, from the prophets and, for all we know, from something Jesus told him. But he absolutely couldn't have known it from science. Nobody had that grasp of things in that time. But no matter. Cataclysm, catastrophe lies in the future. The planet itself may last longer than the people on it.

We can be afraid of global warming, I suppose, but responding to that is not so terribly difficult. One thing, for example, is not to bother rebuilding New Orleans. If, as they say, ocean levels may rise from global warming as much as 200 feet, you don't have to be a scientist to figure out what that means for New Orleans. But, between now and the time the universe recycles, there are some REAL dangers that make me afraid. For example, I had never heard of super volcanoes until recently. I didn't know that there is a super volcano sitting right under Yellowstone National Park. And no one knows when it will decide to blow its top. They only know, ultimately, that it will. I recently watched an excellent program about the eruption of Krakatoa in Indonesia. To put it mildly, it was mind boggling. The blast from that eruption was heard 1,000 miles away. The shock wave was recorded on a Barograph as it went completely around the world seven times. The story of what happened on this planet because of one volcano is mind boggling, and Krakatoa was not even a super volcano. The one under Yellowstone National Park could be as much as 100 times greater and, when it blows, the loss of life, the destruction of the economy, the famines from loss of agriculture, will be nothing short of catastrophic. Did you notice I said "when," not "if"?

There are two dangers facing this planet that are bigger than global warming by a long shot. They are real and there is precious little we can do about them except be worried. . . be very worried. One danger is the six or seven super volcanoes that exist around the globe, any one of which could blow any time. And the other is the danger of a collision in space. Both

have happened before and it is a certainty they will happen again. I came across an interesting summary on the Internet of the things in space that can give us grief. If you want to find it, just search for “catastrophism” and you’ll find Philip Burns website about the number of items in different orbits that intersect the orbit of Earth. There are objects on top of objects out there. There are, on average, about 1,000 objects one kilometer or larger in size that cross the Earth’s orbit on a regular basis. That’s a big object in space. As of August 2000, only about half of these objects have been discovered. The impact of a one kilometer object colliding with Earth would have global effects. There may be more than 500,000 objects, 100 meters or larger in size, crossing orbits with the Earth. The impact of an object 100 meters in size is sufficient to level a city. There may be an astonishing 100 millions objects greater than ten meters in size. The truth is, there is so much stuff in space that, sooner or later, a collision might well create an extinction event. That’s why man is not likely to survive on this planet as long as the planet itself survives. Some 2000 years ago, there was a saint of a man named John. He’d actually known and walked with Jesus. He had touched him with his hands after the Resurrection. He had a vision one day late in life and he saw our future—a future fully compatible with exactly what science tells us. The difference between the way John described it and the way science describes it can be understood mostly in terms of symbolism. Read it for yourself in the eighth chapter of the Book of Revelation.

Returning to the question of what you can do that will actually make a difference—selling your SUV will do about as much good for global warming as cancelling your news subscriptions. You can live your life. You can love your family, cherish your friends, you can do good to your neighbors. We need more of that because these things make both the person who is helped and the person who has been helped feel better. And you can make one very important new friend. His name is Jesus. He said at the Last Supper, “This is my commandment, That you love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I tell you. Henceforth I call you not servants; a servant doesn’t know what his lord is doing; I have called you friends for I have made known to you everything I have learned from the Father.” (John 15:12-15). This new friend will change your value system entirely. He said to his disciples, “Take heed; beware of covetousness for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” Do you have any idea of the grief and the time wasted in your life when you focus on the things you possess— hanging on to them, getting more of them? The deal you make with this new friend will make sure that you live forever. Be careful. . .be very careful.

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