

Real 'inconvenient truth' bucks Gore's premise

"An Inconvenient Truth" opened at The Peak theater last weekend. At least, I think that's where I spent my Friday night. Or maybe I went to services at New Life Church. Just looking at my notes, it's hard to tell.

I quoted someone as saying "This is the most important work man can ever do." Was that Ted Haggard on the Great Commission? Or Al Gore on his climate crusade?

"The evidence is there, if only people choose to see it." The good pastor on biblical truth? The policy wonk on scientific truth? I just can't remember.

"It's not just a political issue, it's a moral issue. GW" Global warming? Gay weddings? For all I know, GW might have been a presidential reference. Both Ted and Al, after all, have close ties to the office.

Not too long ago, I wrote on the apocalyptic visions of the religious right. Now the winds of climate change are blowing from the secular left. It's no wonder I'm confused.

Nor is the media helping. When people make outlandish predictions, they can count on media attention. Terrifying predictions are fun to read about; they make a good story. But when I offer the skeptical perspective that things will go on as usual, nobody ever comes to my press conferences — despite the fact that I've been right every time.

What's true with apocalyptic predictions on the right is just as true on the left. Did you know that, according to Science magazine, the Greenland ice sheet has grown by a total of 20 inches? Bet you didn't, because nobody reported it. This happens all the time. It's the same old story: Predict gloom and doom, get ink and TV time. Report the ordinary, nobody cares.

But there's still more.

Gore says even if the science isn't completely certain, we have to act. And why shouldn't we? If we act and we're wrong, no big deal, but if don't act and we're wrong, we've lost the planet. Does this sound familiar? It's Pascal's wager!

Blaise Pascal was a great Christian thinker of the 17th century. His argument was that we should accept the truth of Christianity, because if we're wrong, we've lost nothing, but if we're right, we've gained everything.

Gore makes the same argument. He's a



OPINION

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kind of Blasé Pascal.

There is one key difference between the liberal apocalypse of "An Inconvenient Truth" and the conservative apocalypse of "Left Behind," and that's the role of science. Gore says that among a thousand scientific articles there wasn't one that contradicted him. Pretty strong stuff.

Unfortunately, the researcher who did the study got her search terms wrong; she used "global climate change" instead of "climate change." (A retraction was published in a later issue of Science,

but the damage was done). Running the search with correct terms yields a much more nuanced picture.

But even if the science eventually comes around, Gore can't imagine that nonpolitical processes could deal with our fossil fuel issues. He wants mandated fuel economy standards in cars. Why not let gas prices rise and let the market produce more fuel-efficient cars? Because that would mean price gouging by those big, bad oil companies. Clearly ordinary citizens are too stupid to recognize that fuel economy in a car saves them money.

Gore thinks this way because he has been a politician for most of his professional life. He can't imagine that people can solve important social problems without direction from a central authority. Despite the farm boy image projected in "An Inconvenient Truth," good ol' Al is really Prince Albert. His father was a senator and vice president of Occidental Petroleum. Gore attended St. Albans and Harvard, and spent 25 years as a career politician in Washington. He'd still be there if Florida had voted for him.

That's why he doesn't see the best way for humans to deal with change on any scale: Living in a wealthier, smarter world. Rich societies don't practice slash-and-burn agriculture. Rich countries invent less polluting technology. Smart civilizations adapt to climate change and even, dare I say, aspire to control it. They use knowledge and voluntary cooperation to achieve results far superior to the dictates of an anointed few. Provided they are given the chance.

That, Mr. Gore, is an inconvenient truth.

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