



All your climate sins forgiven?

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What do leftist, mostly secular elites share with medieval sinners?

They feel bad that the way they live sometimes doesn't quite match their professed dogma.

Many in the medieval church were criticized by internal reformers and the public at large for their controversial granting of penance, especially to the wealthy and influential. Clergy increasingly offered absolution of sins by ordering the guilty to confess. Better yet, sometimes the well-heeled sinners were told to pay money to the church, or to do good works that could then be banked to offset their bad.

Of course, critics of the practice argued that serial confessions simply encouraged serial sinning. The calculating sinner would do good

things in one place to offset his premeditated bad in another. The corruption surrounding these cynical penances and indulgences helped anger Martin Luther and cause the Reformation.

Maybe it was inevitable that the old practice of paid absolution would appeal to elite baby boomers — a class and generation that always seems to want it both ways by compartmentalizing their lives. The only difference is that the new sinners are not so worried about God's wrath as they are about their reputation among their judgmental liberal gods.

Take the idea of "carbon offsets" made popular by Al Gore. If well-meaning environmentalist activists and celebrities either cannot or will not give up their private jets or huge

energy-hungry houses, they can still find a way to excuse their illiberal consumption.

Instead of the local parish priest, green companies exist to take confession and tabulate environmental sins. Then they offer the offenders a way out of feeling bad while continuing their conspicuous consumption.

You can give money to an exchange service that does environmental good in equal measure to your bad. Or, in do-it-yourself fashion, you can calibrate how much energy you hog – and then do penance by planting trees or setting up a wind generator.

Either way, your own high life stays uninterrupted.

Some prominent green activists pay their environmental penance in cash, barter or symbolism to keep the good life. Al Gore, for example, still gets to use 20 times more electricity in his Tennessee mansion than the average household.

Take also the case of Laurie David, the green activist and wife of "Seinfeld" co-creator Larry David. She has recently generated plenty of publicity for her biofuel-powered bus tour to promote environmentalism. But in other circumstances, David still flies on gas-guzzling private jets.

The best thing about this medieval idea of penance is that it can now be repackaged as politically correct "offsets." During the last few dec-

ades, the return of these modern indulgences has caught on in a variety of ways.

Liberal presidential candidate John Edwards, for example, lives in a 30,000-square-foot home, gets \$400 haircuts and recently made a lot of cash by working for a profit-driven, cutthroat hedge fund. How's he supposed to alleviate his guilt over this? Presto! He can lecture others about the inequity of an American system that unfairly created two unequal societies – his rich nation and many others' poor one.

Don Imus was serially warned that his foul and sometimes racist banter would eventually get him into big trouble. Still, as he kept up his trash talking aimed at Jews, women and blacks, Imus also generously donated to, and even set up charities for, wounded veterans and poor children.

Thus, when his slurs inevitably crossed the line one too many times, Imus not only confessed and apologized, but, inevitably, claimed his indulgences of past good deeds in hopes of offsetting the present bad ones.

These varieties of contemporary offsets could be expanded. But you get the picture of the moral ambiguity. Penance, ancient and modern, was thought corrupt because it was not sincere apology nor genuine in its promise to stop the sin.

Thanks to carbon offsets, Al Gore keeps his mansion – and still feels

good while warning others we all can't live as he does.

John Edwards chooses to offset his own privileges by sermonizing about unfairness in America.

And who can forget George Soros? The billionaire can lavishly fund liberal causes such as left-wing think tanks, Web sites and ballot initiatives – and thereby offset his millions made speculating on ex-

change rates and bankrupting small depositors. He's become a hero to those who ordinarily demonize such financial piracy.

In other words, "offsets" is merely a euphemism for words like cynicism and hypocrisy. So by all means help save the planet, worry about the poor, establish charities. Just spare us the medieval idea that such penance ever excuses your own excess.

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