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Children of God Living in a Groaning Creation

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Children of God Living in a Groaning Creation

Abstract

"Virtually every climate researcher in the world agrees that the earth is warming and that human action, especially through the burning of fossil fuels, is the primary cause of this warming."

Posting about a Christian response to climate change from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/children-of-god-living-in-a-groaning-creation/>

Keywords

In All Things, creation, climatic changes, global warming, stewardship

Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Children of God Living in a Groaning Creation

 inallthings.org/children-of-god-living-in-a-groaning-creation/

Dave Schelhaas

July 26, 2018



Once upon a time, we all lived on a planet named Earth, nestled in what seemed the sweetest location in all of space, with a temperature that globally averaged between 58 and 60 degrees Fahrenheit. In our galaxy were other planets such as Mars and Venus. But, Mars with no carbon dioxide in its atmosphere, frigid and lifeless; and Venus was equally uninhabitable, with an atmosphere that is 97% carbon dioxide and 700 degrees warmer than Earth. Earth, with 280 parts CO₂ per million prior to the Industrial Revolution, had just the right amount of CO₂ in its atmosphere, making it a lovely place for all kinds of life. Now, approximately 250 years after the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and the ever-increasing burning of fossil fuels with their CO₂ byproduct, we have over 400 parts CO₂ per million.

This picture, drawn from material in Bill McKibben's *Eaarth*, may not startle one at first reading. Still, the increase in CO₂ is having such a drastic effect on Earth that McKibben suggests that we should no longer call it Earth, but *Eaarth*—the additional “a” indicating a significant, though not fatal, change.

In *Eaarth*, McKibben gives hundreds of examples of how climate change is affecting our planet. Here are just a few to make us sit up and take notice:

- By the end of 2007, the Arctic icecap was 2.2 million miles smaller than it had ever been in recorded history, a decrease of 40% since 1968.
- Warmer temperatures extend the geographic range of mosquitoes so that more than half the world's population, mostly poor people, is now at risk of contracting dengue fever.
- A US government team studying the tropics recently concluded that by the standard meteorological definition, they have expanded more than two degrees of latitude north and south since 1980—and an additional 8.5 million square miles of the Earth are now experiencing a tropical climate.
- The rhododendrons, so profuse on the Himalayan hillsides, are in some places blooming 45 days earlier than they used to.

Nearly thirty years ago, McKibben's first book on climate change, *The End of Nature*, introduced many people, including me, to the issue of climate change. McKibben's information in *Eaarth* is already seven years old, and all we have learned since he wrote the book is that CO2 inputs are increasing and temperatures are rising. We are past the time of debating whether climate change is occurring. Virtually every climate researcher in the world agrees that the earth is warming and that human action, especially through the burning of fossil fuels, is the primary cause of this warming. In response, every nation in the world except one (the United States) is participating in the goals of the Paris Conference on Climate Change.

And, climate change is not an issue that is merely the concern of scientists and politicians. The Christian Reformed denomination also sent representatives to the Paris Conference. We were one of the first evangelical denominations in the United States to affirm the scientific consensus on climate change, calling it "an ethical, social justice and religious issue [that] poses a significant threat to future generations, the poor and the vulnerable." Quoting from its "Contemporary Testimony," the CRC statement on climate change asks us to "Commit ourselves to honor all God's creatures and to protect them from abuse and extinction, for our world belongs to God."

It is not surprising that Christians would see climate change as a religious issue; after all, one of our most quoted and beloved Bible texts, John 3:16, tells us that God loves the world—not just people, but the world. It pleased him when he created it, and he loved it so much that he sent his son to earth "to reconcile *all things* to himself, whether things in earth or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:20). God's delight in his creation reminds us that we also should delight in it. In fact, as CRC pastor Scott Hoezee says in his book *Remember Creation*, "nurturing joy in the creation is our spiritual vocation—our job."

It is also not surprising that Christians would see climate change as a religious issue since God appointed us humans to be caretakers of the creation. Genesis 2:15 says, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it." Commenting on this text four hundred years ago, John Calvin said this:

Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits it to be marred or ruined by neglect.

Moreover, that this economy, and this diligence, with respect to those good things which God has given us to enjoy, may flourish among us, let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.

Again, it is not surprising that Christians would see climate change as a religious issue, for one of the great confessions of the Reformation, The Belgic Confession, states that we know God first,

"by the creation, preservation, and government

of the universe,
since that universe is before our eyes
like a beautiful book
in which all creatures,
great and small,
are as letters
to make us ponder
the invisible things of God..."

Finally, it is not surprising that Christians would be concerned about climate change, for, as St. Paul writes in Romans 8, "the whole creation has been groaning" because of humanity's fall into sin. Paul says that "creation will [one day] be liberated from its bondage to decay" and that the "children of God" will assist in that liberation. Children of God who have ears to hear can hear the creation groaning because of the pain caused by human-induced climate change.

All people, but Christians especially, must respond to the call to tend the creation. As global temperatures rise, as species decrease, as land and water are threatened by overuse and contamination, as the most vulnerable humans are threatened by the effects of climate change, as humans exploit and damage the creation, the earth's groans become louder. We must do what we can to promote the healthful and careful cultivation of creation, to slow its abuses, and to foster in ourselves and others joy and wonder in the marvels of "the universe which God has set before our eyes to make us ponder the invisible things of God, his eternal power and his divinity."