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Conversations on Creation Care: A Review of Saving Us

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Conversations on Creation Care: A Review of Saving Us

Abstract

"For someone who has concern for climate change, or who is struggling to find ways to build bridges and material to work with, this book will be quite helpful."

Posting about the book *Saving Us* 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/conversations-on-creation-care-a-review-of-saving-us/>

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Disciplines

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Comments

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

Conversations on Creation Care: A Review of *Saving Us*

Carl Fictorie

April 21, 2022

Title: *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World*

Author: Katharine Hayhoe

Publisher: Atria/One Signal Publishers

Publishing Date: September 21, 2021

Pages: 320 (Hardcover)

ISBN: 978-1982143831

Last fall, several colleagues and I participated in a panel discussion with Dordt University students on the topic of climate change. As a faculty, we fielded questions such as “How long before Earth is uninhabitable?”, “How do we talk to family members politely when we disagree?”, and “How can we depolarize the topic?” For 90 minutes the panel responded to the questions with grace, wisdom, and respect, even when we had different opinions.

This panel discussion illustrates the premise of Katharine Hayhoe’s *Saving Us*. Hayhoe, a climate scientist on the faculty of Texas Tech University, a lead author of several U.S. national climate assessments, and increasingly well-known speaker on climate change, has a very simple thesis. Because the time for action on climate change is now¹, the best thing we can do is to bring people together and talk about it and find common ground. In over 245 pages, Hayhoe provides wisdom, encouragement, and lots of examples to inform and enable those who have various degrees of concern for climate issues in their efforts to spread the word.

Saving Us is written to the choir. Her primary audience are those who are already convinced that climate change poses a real threat to the planet. She cites a study from Leiserowitz and Maibach, “Global Warming’s Six Americas,” which classifies Americans into six categories of climate concern ranging from “alarmed” to “dismissive.” The most recent of their surveys, cited by Hayhoe, shows that only 7% of the population is dismissive, and she concludes that the remaining 93% are already or could be brought on board regarding the state of climate change. This survey is also used to point out that concern for climate change is not a simple accept/reject binary. There’s a range of opinions, and so each person needs to be approached in a different way.

While Hayhoe is a professional climate scientist and a professing Christian, this book is better viewed as a work of practical psychology and communication. The book contains scientific

material that defends the idea that climate change is real and human-induced, but it is not a structured argument. She discusses biblical reasons for accepting the reality of climate change, but the book is not a theology of creation care. The book contains many ideas for solutions both individual and collective, but is it not a handbook on how to be more environmentally conscious.

Rather, Hayhoe addresses what factors influence skepticism, denial, fear, and rejection as the real threats that climate change is bringing to the planet and the people that inhabit it. Given these diverse responses, we who are already convinced of global warming will need to approach each person individually. Through building relationships, finding points of common concern, and growing mutual respect and trust, we can create space to talk about the issues and help others understand both the problems and the opportunities to address them.

Thus, among all the facts and stories are many specific ideas of what motivates people to believe what they do. Hayhoe attributes much to fear—fear of change, fear from uncertainty, fear from guilt, and fear we are wrong about deeply held beliefs. She notes that humans take all sorts of shortcuts in reasoning, an approach which is useful in day to day living but can cause problems when faced with a large and seemingly distant problem that feels overwhelming.

In response to this, Hayhoe presents a much more optimistic point of view. Climate change is indeed a threat, but it also brings many opportunities. Some are personal (reducing your carbon footprint by eating less meat), some are regional (installing more solar or wind for electrical generation), some are global (ending the use of fossil energy).

At the same time, she's not suggesting we reject modern life and the conveniences thereof. While humanity will likely need to make some changes in lifestyle, she also recognizes that we cannot go back to some idyllic past. Most fundamental is that we still need to produce energy—enough to enable the global population to increase their lifestyles to achieve a par with us in the modern West. Hayhoe discusses these opportunities not as a comprehensive plan for the future of renewable energy, but rather as examples for the reader to use in their conversations with others—a toolkit for conversations.

Readers of *in All things* will want to know that Hayhoe is a Christian and refers to her faith regularly in the book. She grounds her interest in climate change in her belief in the importance of scripture, how that scripture calls us to love and help the poor, sick, and vulnerable, and how climate change makes life more difficult for them. She rejects the notion that we ought to leave the future of the planet to God alone. As God placed us in a position of care over creation, our actions do matter, and God will let us live with the consequences of those actions. She is cautious to separate these consequences from notions that we are reaping the results of sin, nor does she condemn past generations for their energy and climate impacting choices, even when she is critical of current choices. Finally, she maintains an optimistic tone, because her faith provides hope for the future, even though it currently looks uncertain. As she addresses a much more diverse audience than Christians, Hayhoe draws additional inspiration from other

belief systems and encourages the reader to look to their own faith traditions to ground their motivation and hope.

For someone who has concern for climate change, or who is struggling to find ways to build bridges and material to work with, this book will be quite helpful. It is not a book for the skeptic or dismissive. As I hope many of the readers of *in All things* fall into the 93%, I heartily commend this book to these readers, continuing the responsibility of (and conversations toward) caring for God's creation.

1. The following report was published in February 2022. IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers. H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem (eds.). In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.). Cambridge University Press. In Press. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-ii/>

For example, the last point in this report is “The cumulative scientific evidence is unequivocal: Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health. Any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all.”