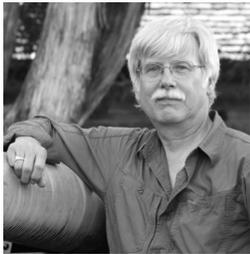


# Uncaring for Creation

COMMENTARY — David Skidmore



As I put these thoughts together in the final days of January, the polar jet stream has rerouted the arctic cap air south over the plains and most of the Midwest sending temperatures plummeting to 40 below zero and wind chills 20 degrees below that, breaking all-time cold records.

The return, or rather weakening, of the polar vortex is another sign of the increasing havoc being waged by the carbon buildup in our atmosphere, also known as global warming.

Climate change is upon us and most rational members of the world's nations acknowledge it, but not, unfortunately the current president who tweeted this week a plea for the return of global warming ("Please come back fast, we need you.") He has been consistent in his skepticism toward climate change and global warming, and in his repudiation of the science confirming it and the environmental policy of his predecessors. Perhaps understandably given his disdain for methodology and his own acknowledged inability to acquire and process knowledge by reading. Or maybe he just doesn't care.

He is not alone. Powerful multinational corporations and conservative evangelicals have made a marriage of climate change skepticism and denial dating to 2005 when Koch Industries, Exxon-Mobil, and others set up The Stewardship Alliance (now Cornwall Alliance) to lobby Congress and block nascent environmental initiatives among evangelicals. The National Association of Evangelicals "For the Health of a Nation" had a brief birth before rejection by delegates and then abandonment by the NAE board in 2006. In 2009 the Cornwall Alliance issued its manifesto, *An Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming*, in which it denies humanity's influence on global warming and asserts intelligent design and God's providence in assuring a self-regulating, and self-correcting planetary system.

For dispensationalists like Christian Zionist Hal Lindsey any global catastrophe and the remedy for it are outside the scope of human agency. The fate of creation is in God's hands so why intercede? Why derail the arrival of the end time with vain campaigns like climate accords, renewable energy tax credits and tighter vehicle emission standards? Maybe because as stewards of God's creation our job is put our talents to work preserving and protecting our island home, God's Kingdom.

The relentless efforts by groups like Americans for Prosperity, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Enterprise Institute have succeeded in seeding doubt about climate change, using the tobacco industry's tactics in the efforts in the 1960s to delay regulation of smoking. Among Congressional Republicans, only 3 percent give credence to the prevailing science on human-made climate change, according to a 2014 PolitFact survey. More worrisome, the general public has vacillated on the issue, questioning the science of climate change in 2009 and 2012, and yet admitting its affects personally in an April 2018 poll.

It doesn't help that Americans are largely a people of the here and now, reluctant to consult the long arc of history, or to

contemplate their bequest to generations to come. We live in the arrogance of self-service, weighing our actions in terms of the benefits that accrue to us. This is the transactional society we have built well before President Trump made it national policy.

Scripture offers an alternative to this approach, one focused on interdependence, commonwealth, and selflessness, emerging in the first words of Genesis when God speaks the oceans and continents into existence. The fundamental message of Genesis, and for that matter the rest of the Torah, is that humanity is called to live in covenantal relationship with God the creator, and to live in right relationship with God's creation — our planet Earth and all living things. This planet is a gift and we are to receive it with thanksgiving and be its stewards.

But, of course, it doesn't work that way. Our ambitions and priorities intercede. We misconstrue dominion to be domination and subjection. We imagine stewardship to be unfettered exploitation. The idea of gift is incomprehensible because we are so oriented to taking, and find no profit in receiving. Humanity has alienated itself from the covenant relationship and its inherent responsibility, and assumed sovereign authority for determining the future of creation.

Over the course of 450 million years earth has experienced five major extinction events, the most recent at the end of the Cretaceous–Paleogene Period 66 million years ago. Now in an era dominated by human activity, the Anthropocene, we are according to many biologists and geologists engineering the sixth extinction through deforestation, the burning of fossil fuels, overfishing and overgrazing, and pollution.

There is no quick fix, no solution without significant sacrifice. Even though in this decades long drift toward a disaster of our own making, the sentiment seems finally to be shifting, the sense of urgency isn't there. Carbon tax proposals have been floated in seven states, and new Democrats in the House and Senate are embracing a New Green Deal; but none of those are a lock. Less so if we enter another recession.

While caring for creation is now enshrined in prayer books and liturgies, including the BCP; memorialized in dozens of General Convention resolutions; and embraced by environmentally minded individuals and groups, the population as a whole is not so deeply invested in the concept or the follow-through.

We can be moved by the onslaught of wildfires and hurricanes but seemingly incapable of grasping the global level of suffering and devastation that climate change will bring. It is not yet on our screens or before our eyes in a sufficiently dramatic and compelling state. At the 2015 U.N. Climate Change Conference the nations agreed to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius this century, and to work towards a 1.5C target. But there are no consequences, politically or economically, if they don't. Last year global warming reached 1C over the past century. Beyond 1.5C warming the Arctic Ocean will be ice free in summer, extreme heat will affect a quarter of the world's population, water scarcity will be experienced by over 400 million people, and crop yields will drop.

This is a disaster unfolding over decades, and will be residing with us for decades if not centuries to come. There are no cheap answers or easy exits. And, we are doing it to ourselves. Call it slow motion suicide.