



TILLING THE GARDEN

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.
(Gen 2:15 NRSV)

Shortly after retiring from the Air Force in 2005 I read *The Planets* by [Dava Sobel](#) in which she suggests that the atmosphere of earth is becoming more like that of Venus as a result of greenhouse gases. I felt Sobel might have overstated the case and asked my environmental-biologist daughter for a good scientific summary of the situation. She recommended *The Weather Makers*, a sobering account of “How Man Is Changing the Climate and What It Means for Life on Earth” by [Tim Flannery](#). This and subsequent study convinced me that we are doing an abysmal job of “tilling and keeping God’s garden”. Global warming results from the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the earth’s

atmosphere limiting the escape of heat radiated from the earth’s surface and causing rise in long-term average temperatures. Greenhouse gases arise from a variety of geological and biological sources and exhibit changes in concentration over cycles of thousands of years. However, the current sharp rise in the concentration of greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide (CO₂), has occurred over only 150 years and directly parallels the expanded use of fossil fuels by human beings for energy.

Long-term temperature rise resulting from increased greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere energizes climatic extremes (flood and drought, extended heat waves, severe storms, polar vortices), disrupts traditional weather patterns (monsoon & dry seasons, seasonal precipitation, rainfall & snow distributions) and induces planetary distress (melting ice packs & permafrost, rising sea levels, warming oceans, desertification). These changes threaten ecological balance across the planet and jeopardize the continued existence of numerous species including human beings. As wealthy Americans we contribute disproportionately to this problem as we consume and waste far more resources than our fair share. We act out of willful ignorance, greed, pride and arrogance - all sins against God and grave insults to God’s Creation.

As Christians we are compelled to avert these consequences and to repent of our actions contributing to them. We are called to be stewards, not devourers, of the bounty provided by the Creator for our survival. “For God so loved the world – the Kosmos, all creation – that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”. (John 3:16) God loves all creation and as his stewards, we are charged with caring for it and its inhabitants. Christ commanded us to *love God and love our neighbors as ourselves*. When asked to define *neighbor*, Christ threw the net wide to include members within and far outside our parochial communities. We are obligated to speak for the voiceless – future generations, the natural world and the disadvantaged. The impacts of climate change fall first and hardest on those least able to respond or get out of the way – the poor, the weak and the marginalized. These people contribute least to the increase in greenhouse gases, but bear the brunt of their deleterious effects because they cannot afford protection. Those who fail to respond because of corporate profit or personal comfort will be placed with *the goats* by a just God. Creation commands our stewardship; justice demands an equitable response.