

56% of young people, 16-25, think humanity is doomed. 75% said they believe the future is frightening. 60% said their national governments were “betraying” them and future generations through their inaction.

A major study of 10,000 young people across 10 countries lays bare the scale of climate crisis-related anxiety felt around the world. The study was conducted by academics and professionals at the University of Bath, Stanford Medical Center, Oxford Health, and others.

The report claims climate anxiety is an “inescapable stressor, and that unpredictable and extreme weather patterns are likely to further add to psychological distress.”

Caroline Hickman from the University of Bath and co-lead author of the study said: “Our children’s anxiety is a completely rational reaction given the inadequate response to climate change they are seeing from governments. What more do governments need to hear to take action?”

Polls suggest that a third or more of Americans younger than 45 either don’t have children or expect to have fewer than they might otherwise because they are worried about climate change.

Millennials and Gen Z are not the first generations to face the potential of imminent, catastrophic, irreversible change to the world they will inherit. But, it seems, they are the first to seriously entertain whether that means they should stop having children.

Meghan Kallman, undecided about having children, was asked if she had hope.

Optimists, she said, think everything’s going to be fine, no matter what happens, excusing themselves from action. Pessimists think we’re doomed no matter what happens, excusing themselves from action. But hope lives in the unstuck middle place where agency is possible. I believe that what we do matters. So, by definition, yes, I feel hopeful.

The biblical understanding of human nature centers on the paradoxical relationship between the self-transcending freedom which human beings have because they are “made in the image of God” and the inescapable limitations which they encounter because they are finite creatures and not God.

Idealists believe in the inevitability of human progress. We will find a way out of the mess we have created. No worries. Pessimists reduce everything to a question of power. Politicians in the pockets of coal and oil companies are seldom persuaded by children like Greta Thunberg.

The biblical understanding of humanity affirms human freedom; we do have agency. It also knows human finitude; super heroes and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry save the day only in the movies. The biblical understanding of humanity is neither optimistic nor pessimistic, it is realistic. We do have agency and what we do has consequences for good or ill.

Psalm 8 has the distinction of being the first biblical text to reach the moon. The Apollo 11 mission left a silicon disc containing messages from 73 nations, including the Vatican, which contributed the text of this Psalm. Psalm 8 was an appropriate choice for it is both an eloquent proclamation of the cosmic sovereignty of God and a remarkable affirmation of the exalted status and vocation of the human creature.

The Psalm recalls Genesis 1. God and humans are partners in the care of creation, because God has made the risky choice to share God's power! God's 'name' or reputation is bound up with the human performance of dominion. The identity and destiny of God, of humanity, and of creation are inextricably intertwined. Theology, anthropology, and ecology are inseparable.

From the moment we were persuaded that limits on our freedom were arbitrarily imposed, we have fallen prey to the lure of power, possessions, and prestige. If our essence is free self-determination, our sin is the wrong use of freedom and the destructive consequences that follow. Human evil, primarily expressed in undue self-concern, is a corruption of our essential freedom. A greater evil is always a corruption of a greater good.

In relation to creation dominion has become domination; rule has become ruin; subordination in the divine purpose has become subjection to human sinfulness. Creation suffers; we suffer. Grief, anger, guilt, despair grip and govern the hearts and minds of our daughters and granddaughters, our sons and grandsons.

In the vision of Psalm 8, civilization is meant to be a vast project of stewardship. God didn't just make us; God made us both a representation and representatives of the commonwealth of God. God uses the weak and seemingly insignificant human creature as a partner in caring for creation that is constantly threatened by its enemy, chaos.

Psalm 8 begins and ends with praise of God. The body of the Psalm has to do with human dominion. Power absent the praise of God exploits creation and corrupts the environment. The work of stewardship, of the creature who does not pretend to be the creator, is to build a habitat fit for human flourishing.

Walter Brueggemann believes it is not naïve to say that the first step in addressing the environmental crisis is to praise God, for praising God is the act of worship and mode of existence that reminds us that we human beings are not free to do whatever our science and technology enable us to do. Praise flies in the face of our culture's tendency to unrestrained exploitation. *And they brought small children to him that he might touch them; but the disciples scolded them. Seeing this Jesus was deeply annoyed and said to them, "Let the little children come to me, do not prevent them; for of such is the Kingdom of God. I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child certainly may not enter into it." And, enfolding them in his arms and laying hands upon them, he blesses them.*

Our children and grandchildren are crying out to be seen, to be heard, to be enfolded in loving arms. How better can we bless them than by building a habitat on earth fit for their flourishing?