Justice for the Earth: A Way Forward

Presented by
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Outline

• Review of where we are in climate change
• Review of positions taken by different faith communities
• A Way Forward: A proposal by the Citizen’s Climate Lobby
Where are we in climate change?

The UN Conference of Parties 21 (COP21)

• Paris, Dec., 2015

• A potentially historic meeting for the future well-being of the earth and its inhabitants
Where are we in climate change?

A few numbers

• Atmospheric level of CO₂, 2015: 400 ppm
Where are we in climate change?

A few numbers

• Atmospheric level of CO$_2$, 2015: 400 ppm

• Suggested maximum atmospheric level of CO$_2$ if we are to avoid the worst outcomes of climate change: 450 ppm (2$^\circ$C)
Where are we in climate change?

A few numbers

• Atmospheric level of CO$_2$, 2015: 400 ppm
• Suggested maximum atmospheric level of CO$_2$ if we are to avoid the worst outcomes of climate change: 450 ppm
• Average rate of increase of atmospheric CO$_2$, 2004-2014: 2.1 ppm/yr
Where are we in climate change?

A few numbers

• Atmospheric level of CO$_2$, 2015: 400 ppm
• Suggested maximum atmospheric level of CO$_2$ if we are to avoid the worst outcomes of climate change: 450 ppm
• Average rate of increase of atmospheric CO$_2$ 2004-2014: 2.1 ppm/yr

• We have $50/2.1 = 24$ years
The carbon-based (fossil) fuel situation

• What would happen if we burned all of the fossil fuels now thought to be recoverable?
The carbon-based (fossil) fuel situation

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• Atmospheric CO$_2$ levels would rise to over $650$ ppm
The carbon-based (fossil) fuel situation

• What would happen if we burned all of the fossil fuels now thought to be recoverable?
• Atmospheric CO$_2$ levels would rise to over 650 ppm
• To limit CO$_2$ levels to 450 ppm we must leave 80% of fossil fuel resources now known to be recoverable in the ground
The Response of Science Communities
adapted from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_opinion_on_climate_change

Since 1991, 131 reports on climate change have been published by professional scientific groups

- National & International Science Academies, IPCC
- Professional Societies, (physics, chemistry, geoscience, meteorology, agronomy, biology, health sciences)

- **127** affirm AGW (anthropogenic global warming)
- **4** are non-committal (geological societies)
Conclusion #1

• The safest place for fossil fuels is in the ground
The Response of Different Faith Communities

http://fore.yale.edu/climate-change/statements-from-world-religions/

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Eastern Orthodox Response: Patriarch Bartholomew

• “For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sin;

• For humans to commit [these] crimes against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God”
“Faithful to the responsibility that we have been given within God's good creation, it is prudent for us to listen to the world's scientific leaders as they describe changes occurring in the world's climate, changes that are already being experienced by many people throughout the world.”
Bartholomew asks us to:

• replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing

• adopt a new asceticism which “entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God’s world needs.”  

(Adapted from Laudato Si’ paragraph 6)
Christian Reformed Church Response, 2012

http://www.crcna.org/resources/synod-resources
http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/CreationStewardship.pdf

• Climate change is occurring and is very likely due to human activity
• Human-induced climate change is a moral, ethical, and religious issue
• Human-induced climate change poses a significant threat to future generations, the poor, and the vulnerable
• Human-induced climate change, as a global phenomenon, poses a significant challenge to us all
• Urgent action at the personal, communal, and political levels is required to address climate change.
Synod calls upon churches, members, and denominational bodies to:

• be voices for justice and public examples of living sustainably, promoting stewardship, and seeking justice for the poor and vulnerable among us

• reduce individual and collective carbon emissions to the atmosphere

• consider and advocate for public strategies to reduce carbon emissions and move us toward very low or zero net emissions
“If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith”

(Ch. 2, paragraph 64)
“…..we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, *so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*”

(Ch. 1, Paragraph 49)
“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.” (Ch 4, p. 139)
“We come as Jews and rabbis with great respect for what scientists teach us;... it is about the unfolding mystery of God’s Presence ... especially in the history and future of our planet.”

“Although we accept scientific accounts of earth’s history, we continue to see it as God’s creation, and we celebrate the presence of the divine hand in every earthly creature.”
“So we call for a new sense of eco-social justice – a tikkun olam that includes tikkun tevel, the healing of our planet.”

“We urge those who have been focusing on social justice to address the climate crisis, and those who have been focusing on the climate crisis to address social justice.”
“The pace of Global climate change today is of a different order of magnitude from the gradual changes that previously occurred... Moreover, it is human-induced: we have now become a force dominating nature.”
“Human activity is putting such a strain on the natural functions of the earth that the ability of the planet’s ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted.”
We affirm that –

• God created the Earth in perfect equilibrium (*mīzān*);

• By His immense mercy we have been given fertile land, fresh air, clean water and all the good things on Earth that makes our lives here viable and delightful;

• The Earth functions in natural seasonal rhythms and cycles: a climate in which living beings – including humans – thrive;

• The present climate change catastrophe is a result of the human disruption of this balance
We call upon the Conference of the Parties (COP) [meeting] taking place in Paris this December, 2015 to [reach] an equitable and binding conclusion, bearing in mind

• The scientific consensus on climate change, which is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere....;
• The need to set clear targets and monitoring systems;
• The dire consequences to planet earth if we do not do so;
Conclusion #2

• The safest place for fossil fuels is in the ground
• There is wide agreement among diverse religious groups about the need to address climate change; this is an issue on which we can all cooperate
Recent Developments

• The head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) called for a carbon tax at the IMF/World Bank annual meeting in Lima, Peru. (Wed., Oct. 7, 2015)  

• Bill Gates says that the implementation of a carbon tax on fossil fuels is essential. The Atlantic, Nov. 2015
A Possible Way Forward

• The Citizen’s Climate Lobby
  • https://citizensclimatelobby.org/
Citizens’ Climate Lobby

- Founded in 2007, San Diego, CA
- 257 chapters worldwide (230 in the U.S.)
- 12000 + members
- A grassroots, nonpartisan organization of citizens, not paid lobbyists
Citizens’ Climate Lobby

Purpose

• To build political will for action on climate change
• To empower individuals and groups to exercise their political will and power

CCL is a nonprofit organization with 501c-3 and 501c-4 designations
Citizens’ Climate Lobby

Primary focus

- To lobby congress to pass “carbon fee and dividend” legislation (CF&D)
This means:

Putting a price on carbon

Result:

Higher fossil fuel prices

Result:

Decreasing fossil fuel use

Result:

Less CO₂ is emitted

Result:

Shift to cleaner energy
CF&D How it Works

Fee

• Carbon fee is based on the amount of \( \text{CO}_2 \) emitted per ton of fuel burned
• Fee is collected at the point of production or import
• Fee is increased yearly according to a published schedule
CF&D How it Works

Fee ... Example

Suppose Fee = $20/ton CO₂

Burning gasoline produces

20 lb CO₂/gal

or

2000 lb (1 ton)/100 gal

So cost of gasoline would rise

$0.20/gal
CF&D How it Works

Dividend

• All of the fee revenue that is collected is returned to US households - monthly dividend
• The monthly dividends are distributed in equal shares
• 2/3 of households break even or come out ahead
CF&D How it Works

Dividend... Example

• 10 B gal gasoline/month

Generated fee

10 B gal x $0.20/gal = $2 B/mo.

Suppose 100 million households:

Dividend

$2 B/100 M = $20/mo
Handling Exports

• US businesses that export goods to nations that do not have a price on carbon fuels will receive a refund of the carbon fee allocated to the exported goods.
CF&D How it Works

Handling Imports

• Goods that are imported from nations that do not have a price on carbon fuels, will be assessed an import tariff based on the amount of carbon emitted by their manufacture.
CF&D Results for economy

There will be price incentives to:

• Decrease investment in fossil fuels
• Increase investment in clean energy
• Shift to energy efficient goods and services
CF&D Result for businesses

• A predictable fee structure simplifies business planning

• Businesses will pass along increased cost of fuels in the price of products and services

• Energy efficient products and services will be favored
CF&D Result for Government

CF&D will

• Be revenue neutral
• Be administered by existing government agencies
• Minimize the increase in size of government
Democrats

- Already tend to favor imposition of a fee (tax) on carbon fuels
- Can probably be persuaded to support revenue neutrality
Republicans

• May like revenue neutrality ("no new taxes")
• Minimizes the need for additional regulation by the EPA
CF&D: Economic impacts

- Regional Economic Modelling Inc. study (REMI study)
- Commissioned by CCL
Under CF&D, national employment increases between 2 million and 3 million over 20 years compared to BAU.
Gross Domestic Product Increases

U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) increases under CF&D relative to BAU.
Monthly Dividends Grow

As the carbon fee increases each year, so do the dividends to American households.
Real disposable personal income per capita increases by $500 in ten years and by nearly $800 after 20 years relative to BAU.
Carbon Dioxide Emissions Fall

In 20 years, CO2 emissions would be reduced 50 percent below 1990 levels.
“Most impressive is the work of the Citizens’ Climate Lobby, a relatively new, fast growing, nonpartisan, nonprofit group with more than 200 chapters [updated] across the United States and Canada. If you want to join the fight to save the planet, to save creation for your grandchildren, there is no more effective step you could take than becoming an active member of this group.”

— Dr. James Hansen, physicist, former head of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies, NASA
How We Create Political Will

- Interact directly, politely, but persistently, with Members of Congress – we lobby

- Communicate through newspapers and other media

- Motivate community members to communicate our views to Congress
How you can help?

• Join us

• *Sign a Letter of Support*

• Join us

• *Contribute (time, effort, $)*

• *Join us!*
Conclusion #3

• The safest place for fossil fuels is in the ground
• There is wide agreement among diverse religious groups about the need to address climate change; this is an issue on which we can all cooperate
• The way forward is feasible and not very complicated
Thank you for coming