Summary of Jonathan Fransen’s New Yorker Article: “What If We Stopped Pretending?”

**We Have Two Choices**

If you care about the planet, and about the people and animals who live on it, there are two ways to think about this. You can keep on hoping that catastrophe is preventable, and feel ever more frustrated or enraged by the world’s inaction. Or you can accept that disaster is coming, and begin to rethink what it means to have hope.

**We’re Not Going to Avert Climate Catastrophe**

Hardly a day seems to pass without my reading that it’s time to “roll up our sleeves” and “save the planet”; that the problem of climate change can be “solved” if we summon the collective will. Although this message was probably still true in 1988, when the science became fully clear, we’ve emitted as much atmospheric carbon in the past thirty years as we did in the previous two centuries of industrialization. The facts have changed, but somehow the message stays the same. Scientists in the recent past have not exaggerated the threat. They’ve probably underestimated it.

I don’t see human nature fundamentally changing anytime soon. I can run ten thousand scenarios through my model, and in not one of them do I see the two-degree target being met.

**Investing Our Energies in What We Value**

I wonder what might happen if, instead of denying reality, we told ourselves the truth.

False hope of salvation can be actively harmful. If you persist in believing that catastrophe can be averted, you commit yourself to tackling a problem so immense that it needs to be everyone’s overriding priority forever. If you accept the reality that the planet will soon overheat to the point of threatening civilization, there’s a whole lot more you should be doing.

All-out war on climate change made sense only as long as it was winnable. Once you accept that we’ve lost it, other kinds of action take on greater meaning, such as…

- disaster preparedness,
- reparations to inundated countries,
- future humanitarian relief,
- preserving grasslands,
- eating less meat
- preparing for fires and
- floods and refugees
- creating a more just and civil society
- combat extreme wealth inequality
- promoting respect for laws
- supporting a free and independent press
- ridding the country of assault weapons

**Summary:** All-out war on climate change made sense only as long as it was winnable. Once you accept that we’ve lost it, other kinds of action take on greater meaning.
Summary of Class Talk on Creation

**What Does the Bible Say About the World?**

1. The biblical presentation of God’s work of creation is not bringing new things out of nothingness, but taming and arranging chaos.
2. Organizing chaos is more like the theological category of redemption than creation. God’s creative work has the character of fixing, improving, controlling, beautifying, sustaining and the like.
3. God’s creative (which looks like redemption) activity does not cease in Genesis but continues through the Hebrew Bible and presumably through history. Creation images such as wind and waters crop up throughout the Hebrew Bible.
4. Chaos along the way is revealed to be evil or as close to evil as the Old Testament gets. In the post-exilic period into the New Testament the prime embodiment of evil is Satan.
5. Human injustice and apostasy appears to take the side of or equates to chaos. Sometimes chaos presses back at God’s creative work as when Egypt mistreated the Hebrews. The ensuing chaos took the form of ecological disruption.
6. The Old Testament’s dominant image of redemption is God’s continuing creation or continuing ordering of chaos.

None of these insights are verifiable or falsifiable by scientific method. They stand as propositions along with the reality of God, our own image of God character, the efficacy of prayer, and so on. They must, in other words, be taken by faith to cast a light on the nature of our world.

**How Should Christians Live In a Time of Climate Change?**

1. Climate change and global warming are spiritually significant. These are something Christians need to be talking about in church. The discussion should be an exploration into what Creation is saying to us and what we must do in faithful response.
2. God continues to work in the world and has not abandoned it. Despair is not appropriate.
3. There is a deep connection between justice and the health of the world. Scientists share this understanding. Climate breakdown is not about chemistry. It’s about greed, oppression, and poverty. It is the task of the Church to explore, expose, and repent of its complicity with creation damaging injustice.
4. The Earth belongs to God. We deceive ourselves when we think that land occupancy or ownership, national boundaries, and other human divisions of the natural world supersede God’s sovereignty over all things.