

Editorial: Living faithfully as the planet crumbles

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Can you recall a time when the world was more torn up than it is right now?

You may have been alive during the Holocaust and World War II. You remember the attempted extermination of the Jews. Bombed-out cities in Europe and Asia. Hundreds of thousands of young men from around the globe slain on battlefields and open seas. Destitution and starvation. The atrocities of that era seem impossible to supersede. Still, a shrinking minority of people were alive then and old enough to have witnessed the carnage.



Editor Marv Knox You may suggest the late 1960s and early '70s. Vietnam carved a scar that still aches, more than four decades later. Meanwhile, China eviscerated its own society with the Cultural Revolution. The Soviet Union tightened its iron grip on Eastern Europe and mid-Asia. And the Cold War threatened the planet with nuclear annihilation. Unless you're at least middle-aged, those events are not part of your memory.

The death toll of WW II and the Holocaust soared higher. The national pain of Vietnam seared deeper. But the comprehensive calamity of the world's current crises eclipse any simultaneous set of cataclysms, at least in our lifetimes.

However you view the news—paper, online, TV or radio—you're treated to a horror show every day. Current events? More like the macabre imagination of a homicidal lunatic. Consider ...

The Middle East

The Islamic State—formerly known as ISIS—is hell-bent on creating a caliphate, an Islamic theocracy/police state, out of large swaths of Iraq and Syria. Diplomats and Middle Eastern scholars warn this movement could produce the most terror-ridden, violent regime the region has seen. That's a high, high bar for ferocity.

In Syria, we're witnessing not simply a civil war, but genocide. Bashar al Assad ranks among the pantheon of bloodiest dictators for slaughtering his own people.

Violence in Israel/Gaza seems to grow by the day, as the body count mounts. What makes this situation so intractable—beyond millennia of animus—is the amount of sympathy and hostility generated by both sides. Who can't quiver with compassion for annihilated Palestinian children? And who can't wretch with fear for Israeli families in the path of bombs. Israel's literal overkill is balanced by Hamas' cynical imbedding of missile launchers in civilian residential areas.

Ukraine and Africa

As if the Russian-fomented Ukrainian civil war weren't bad enough, now somebody is shooting a commercial airplane out of the sky, snuffing out almost 300 innocent lives.

Boko Haram is holding a gun to the head of the entire nation of Nigeria. The ruthless brigade of semi-literate thugs has captured the West African nation's daughters and is slaughtering its sons.

Volatility in sub-Saharan Africa pits Christian against Muslim and undermines not only the peace but also the economy of the region.

Afghanistan

Years of war to democratize Afghanistan and Iraq seem to be going for naught, as tribalism and political corruption undo much of the good done by U.S. troops and other international peacekeepers.

Pakistan, ostensibly a United States ally and a nuclear-powered third-world fiefdom, seems perpetually at risk of reverting to a belligerent theocracy.

Human trafficking and immigrant refugees

More than 20 million, and up to 30 million people are slaves today, and about 80 percent of them are exploited sexually. The average price of a slave is \$90. The National Human Trafficking Hotline receives more calls from Texas than anywhere else.

Texas' border with Mexico has been flooded with more than 50,000 child refugees since last fall. While most are in their teens, many are in diapers. They are fleeing poverty, violence, sexual abuse and drug gangs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico.

Disease and environmental collapse

The deadly ebola virus and AIDS are decimating West Africa.

Environmental collapse is fouling the air, poisoning the streams and killing the oceans.

The litany of woes—and if you've been paying attention to the news, you could supplement this list—depresses the spirit. We live in hard times; we face enormous challenges. It feels as if our planet is crumbling beneath our feet.

A friend pleaded over the phone, “Knox, you’ve got to write an editorial about all the pain and agony in this world.” He’s right. Problem is, I don’t know what to say. Nobody has an answer to all our global ills. If someone could lead us to overcome our catalog of catastrophe, she or he surely would earn the world’s accolades. But that’s not likely to happen.

How to respond

In the meantime, here are some suggestions:

- **Pray, sisters and brothers, pray.** This sounds simplistic, but prayer for the world’s woes is the first place to start if we want to heal them. Prayer is not a magical incantation that fixes everything. We could get in a long debate about divine providence, human free will, evil and suffering, and the efficacy of intercessory prayer. But at the very least, prayer changes us. And if we’re changed, one individual at a time, we can make a difference.
- **Learn.** Absorb global current events. Watch and read news. And take in an array of news and perspectives. If you’re only watching Fox News or MSNBC, your range is too narrow, and you’re not uncovering truth. Listen to voices with ideas different from your own. Learn from them. And think for yourself. Learning is important if we want to pray intelligently.
- **Vote with the world in mind.** You don’t need me to tell you: Our politics has degenerated. Unfortunately, primaries award victory to the most partisan candidates who appeal to the narrowest range of self-interest. No wonder politicians rarely rise above the partisan fray. And the crummy state of politics is not their fault; it’s ours. We put them there. Don’t vote for pols with simplistic solutions. Anybody who says our state, national and international problems are simple is either crazy or lying. We need to elect politicians capable of critical thinking and self-sacrifice.
- **Live conscientiously.** Our lifestyles matter. Our use of our money makes a difference around the world. If Americans were to exercise economic

discipline and use our purchases to reward human rights, liberty, freedom and security, then together we could make a difference in parts of the world we'll never see.

Of course, this is an over-simplification. The world's problems seem intractable. They won't be solved any time soon. But we've got to start somewhere, and someone's got to lead. It might as well be us.

So, begin with prayer. Pray without ceasing. And live in hope.