

Guest editorial: Reject fear, despair to confront climate crisis with faith

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No matter where we are, the climate crisis is not far from home.

For some time, the world's most vulnerable, in the Global South, largely have borne the brunt of suffering and climate-induced devastation. Those who have the power to change things have so far all but ignored "the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth," as Pope Francis wrote in his encyclical a little over a year ago.

But just this summer, the United States—one of the world's wealthiest nations—has seen historic droughts, unprecedented floods in Louisiana and wildfires in California, killing many and displacing tens of thousands.

Global warming—unless checked by action far more radical than anything comprehended by mainstream politics—is on track to undermine so many food and natural systems that it threatens to collapse human society as we know it, within the lifetimes of many alive today.

The need for action commensurate with this truth is slowly breaking into the mainstream of the climate discussion, but not quickly enough.

No stomach for truth

Although the climate emergency poses an urgent existential threat, Hillary Clinton, the possible next president of the United States, has put forward a climate plan that seeks to cut emissions only 30 percent from 2005 levels by 2025. Meanwhile, scientists with the U.N. [Intergovernmental Panel on](#)

[Climate Change](#) warn we already are in imminent danger of breaking through the upper limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming set forth in the Paris agreements.

The reality of the present moment is so harrowing, it is no wonder many choose not to engage with it at all. But “the truth does not change with our ability to stomach it,” to quote the great Catholic writer Flannery O’Connor.

Fear, despair, hopelessness and depression all are natural—even highly rational—responses to our present situation, and I am familiar with all of them. I have found very little in today’s culture or within the current climate movement to help us stomach this truth.

Faith prohibits fear

Yet my faith explicitly prohibits fear: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Psalm 23:4).

As such, people of faith ought to be the first to confront this new reality and to throw themselves into building the kind of climate movement we need—a movement built not on the fear of pain, privation or death, but on a fierce love of life.

While many U.S. environmental groups hailed the release of “Laudato Si’” last year, few political leaders have heeded Pope Francis’ urgent call for the development of policies that “drastically reduce” greenhouse gas emissions “in the next few years.”

This does not mean such action would be impossible, given sufficient political will. About a year after graduating from college, I abandoned my career plans to volunteer for an organization that seeks to respond with a World War II-scale mobilization of our economy and society.

Sustainability by '25

[The Climate Mobilization's Victory Plan](#) envisions the United States achieving ecological sustainability by 2025—by abandoning the reckless “throwaway culture” that is endangering creation, devastating the poor and sacrificing the future of life on Earth.

In “Laudato Si’,” Pope Francis quotes Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew: “It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet.”

A day before the pope’s latest [call for action](#) on the Catholic Church’s World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, Patriarch Bartholomew also urged us to rise to this occasion: “We call everyone to mobilize forces and especially to pray in the fight to protect the environment in its broadest sense, that is as a harmonic conjunction of the natural environment and culture of mankind.”

We cannot say it is too late, too difficult or too unrealistic to act. The Christian view is that as long as there is a speck of dust left on Earth, it will be worthy of our humble love.

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