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How do we prevent global climate catastrophe?

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A little hot for you lately? I've been in both Washington, D.C., and St. Louis in the last couple weeks, and the temperatures in both places were well above 100 degrees most days. There is drought in the Midwest. There have been devastating fires in the dried forests of Colorado. Yes, some of these events may be short-term "weather." But the patterns of a warming planet are unmistakable. We are experiencing the signs of a trend.

If you want to learn more, I recommend Bill McKibben's article [1] in the latest issue of *Rolling Stone* with the most recent math on climate change. He documents scary stuff. Very scary stuff.

The warming of our planet is moving faster than predicted earlier, and yet the fossil-fuel industry and most world governments act as if there is nothing wrong with drilling in the Arctic, setting up the Keystone pipeline, or "fracking" the earth to extract natural gas. The devastation this will wreak on our planet in the long term is predictable.

There is strong and consistent science on climate change, warning of catastrophic results for our planet in this century if the present course of action is unchecked. Yet world governments act as if they have all the time in the world to stem the tide of carbon emissions. The recent Rio+20 conference was a flop. Nothing new emerged. And in previous conferences (except for Kyoto early on), no agreements were binding on the nation states at any level.

McKibben notes: "Alone among businesses, the fossil-fuel industry is allowed to dump its main waste, carbon dioxide, for free." He argues (as many environmentalists have) for putting a price on carbon. That, of course, would cut into the profitability of the fossil-fuel industry. That is the basis for their opposition to climate action.

Insofar as a movement needs an enemy, McKibben argues, the fossil-fuel industry (coal, oil, natural gas) is it. He says it's time to begin pressuring institutions and individuals of all kinds to pull investment from those industries (just as was done to fight apartheid in South Africa). And this is the very industry that is trying to influence our elections to escape any restraints and ensure its own future profitability.

Climate change is a fundamental issue of social justice and peace in our world. It is a "life" issue extraordinaire. Climate change will devastate the poor most directly and will create conditions for new conflicts over land and water resources.

For this, the world needs a movement with many powerful centers. If the Catholic bishops are looking for a new "life" focus that will earn them some credibility from the laity in the long run, this might be it. Meanwhile, lay Catholic and interfaith groups can keep focusing attention on it and joining the larger environmental movement in its quest to save the planet from catastrophe.

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[1] http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719