News
EarthBeat



Francis, the comic strip by Pat Marrin



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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the May 1 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

Here's something I've been thinking about lately: The terms of the debate.

Last weekend, I read this New York Times article showing Republicans are now responding to the tanking economy by aggressively attacking climate change policies. Their basic message is that the coronavirus pandemic is a preview for what Americans will be forced to suffer under any kind of major climate action. Democrats, they say, would sacrifice the economy and jobs to curb carbon emissions and slow climate change.

It's a strong strategy. It places Democrats on the defensive, forcing them to respond to G.O.P. talking points rather than push their own. It also presents voters with a simple choice: protect the environment, or protect the basic standard of living.

Of course, my friends, that choice is a false one, but it's a choice that I believe has defined the terms of the environmental debate for quite some time now.

Covering Earth Day last month got me interested in the environmental movement's history, so I recently picked up the 1971 book Encounters with the Archdruid by John McPhee to get started. In it, McPhee tracks confrontations between David Brower, the Sierra Club's first executive director, with three of his ideological foes – a miner, a golf course developer and the United States Bureau of Reclamation. It strikes me that the debates Brower waged 50 years ago, long before climate change became a household term, were within much of the same framework as the one Republicans are currently attempting to box climate advocates into.

Check out this exchange between Brower and Charles Park, a geologist who wanted to mine copper near Glacier Peak in Washington (I've inserted names so you can see who is talking):

> Brower: "If we're down to where we have to take copper from places this beautiful, we're down pretty far."
>
> Park: "Minerals are where you find them. The quantities are finite. It's criminal to waste minerals when the standard of living of your people depends upon them. … You have to go get them where they are. Our standard of living is based on this."
>
> Brower: "For a fifty-year cycle, yes. But for the long term, no. We have to drop our standard of living, so that people a thousand years from now can have any standard of living at all."

Here's the thing. Back then, in the nascent days of the environmental movement, Brower's willingness to sacrifice the short-term standard of living for the sake of long-lasting sustainability might have made sense. But today, we no longer have to make that choice. The development of clean technology means preventing a climate crisis now requires deep commitment rather than dreadful sacrifice.

Let's be clear about this. A green recovery plan for the pandemic would be good for the economy and good for people. A green recovery would not just protect the world for the future, it would improve it in the present.

A study from Oxford University, led by Nobel prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, found that projects that cut greenhouse gas emissions and stimulate economic activity would provide higher short and long term returns on government spending than traditional stimulus spending. Investing in clean infrastructure, the study shows, would actually offer a stronger economic recovery. Not only that, but a green stimulus would also improve the quality of life for vulnerable low-income and minority communities that have been burdened by the harmful effects of pollution for generations.

The G.O.P. wants people to focus on what climate action would cost. Climate advocates should emphasize all there is to gain.

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Here's what's new on EarthBeat this week:

- With the fifth anniversary approaching of Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home," EarthBeat wants to give all our readers a chance to read the document. Check out our new series, Digging Into Laudato Si', for short guided readings and reflections three times a week.
- Speaking of Laudato Si', anniversary celebration festivities kick off this weekend. Brian Roewe covers what you can expect with the nine-day Vatican-sponsored event.
- This Religion News Service article dives into questions the pandemic raises about the relationship between humans and animals. Check it out.
- In this Small Earth Story, a "Treehugger" mom teaches her children about Laudato Si'.

- Like the comic strip at the top? Want to share? Here's the link!

Other climate-related news from this week:

- Coronavirus has pushed the coal industry to the brink. Now, The New York Times is reporting that renewable energy is poised to produce more electricity than coal in the U.S. this year for the first time in history. An important milestone.
- Want some productive reading? Science News has published a list of 6 books that explore climate science and solutions.
- Shahzeen Attari, a professor at Indiana University, sat down for an interview with The Washington Post to discuss how psychology makes it hard to solve climate change. "We have this pernicious problem called 'status quo bias.' We're kind of stuck in our ways as social animals, so it's very hard to get people to change," she says.
- Speaking of change, if you're looking to alter your diet, Vox has a list of worst foods for the planet.
- Axios reports wealthy donors that previously funded far-left climate activists are now shifting and beginning to support more moderate ideas.
- Sunrise Movement has launched a new sister movement for those of you who "don't identify as a young person." Their launch call is today at 6:30 p.m. ET.

Upcoming Event:

As part of Laudato Si' week, the Canadian branch of the Global Catholic Climate Movement will host a one-hour teaching webinar featuring Sister at 1:30 p.m. EST May 20. Sister Priscilla Solomon, CSJ and Sister Linda Gregg, CSJ, both of the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada will lead the webinar. More details and a link to the registration page here. One advantage of so many events moving online is their accessibility to a wider audience. If you'd like to expand the audience of your next virtual climate event, please post it here.

Thanks for reading.

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This story appears in the **EarthBeat Weekly** feature series. View the full series.