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Is it time for a conversation on gun violence?

How do we mark time? In many ways. If we are in the midst of war, the names and dates of various battles mark the passage of time. If we are parents, the dates of our children’s births become milestones.

It was striking last week to hear President Barack Obama say that the Charleston shootings that claimed the life of nine black congregants at a Bible study meeting was the 14th mass killing he has responded to during his presidency. One of those was the horrific Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre that claimed 20 children and six adults.

The president asked: When will this nation face its epidemic of gun violence?

When, indeed?

The most telling answer to the president’s question was the silence among Republican presidential candidates and members of Congress. The guns issue is radioactive. It makes cowards of otherwise outspoken men and women.

Here in Oregon, we have been less touched by the large cataclysms. But one of the ways we could denote Oregon history is by what Kip Kinkel did in 1998 at Thurston High School. Kinkel killed two and wounded 28. Then there was the Clackamas Town Center shootings in 2012, where two people were killed, though it was quickly overshadowed by

Sandy Hook three days later.

So how does the gun lobby answer President Obama’s question? It says there is never time for a serious discussion of gun violence, that emotions are too high and the culprit is elsewhere. It’s the mentally ill, lax laws letting dangerous people out of prison, or even the victims themselves, for being opposed to gun control. If you can believe that.

There is serious literature on the topic, full of ideas that are not apocalyptic. A good reference is David Hemenway’s 2004 book “Private Guns, Public Health.” Hemenway is one of a group of public health physicians and researchers who have approached gun violence (homicides, accidental shootings, suicides) as a public health concern.

The gun lobby was so alarmed by the statistics gathered by these physicians that its congressional allies have prohibited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from keeping track of deaths and accidents caused by guns. No one would suggest we remain similarly ignorant about deaths from drowning or automobile accidents.

Here is something we can predict. If Jeb Bush or Marco Rubio or Rand Paul win the presidency, they will be asked regularly — during their four to eight years in the White House — to comment on the latest horrific gun massacre. We can mark our calendars.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS



Pope’s call to action goes beyond the environment

In Pope Francis’ sprawling new encyclical, “Laudato Si’,” there are many mansions: a meditation on biblical ecology, a discussion of environmental policy, a critique of consumerism, even a reflection on the perils of social media.

What everyone wants to know, of course, is whether the pope takes sides in our most polarizing debate. And he clearly does. After this document, there’s no doubting where Francis stands in the great argument of our time.

But I don’t mean the argument between liberalism and conservatism. I mean the argument between dynamists and catastrophists.

Dynamists are people who see 21st-century modernity as a basically successful civilization advancing toward a future that’s better than the past. They do not deny that problems exist, but they believe we can innovate our way through them while staying on an ever-richer, ever-more-liberated course.

Dynamists of the left tend to put their faith in technocratic government; dynamists of the right, in the genius of free markets. But both assume that modernity is a success story whose best days are ahead.

Catastrophists, on the other hand, see a global civilization that for all its achievements is becoming more atomized and balkanized, more morally bankrupt, more environmentally despoiled. What’s more, they believe that things cannot go on as they are: that the trajectory we’re on will end in crisis, disaster, dégringolade.

Like dynamists, catastrophists can be on the left or right, stressing different agents of our imminent demise. But they’re united in believing that current arrangements are foredoomed, and that only a true revolution can save us.

This is Pope Francis’ position, and the controlling theme of his encyclical. It includes, as many liberals hoped and certain conservatives feared, a call to action against climate change, which will no doubt cause Republicans to squirm during political campaigns to come.

But reading “Laudato Si’” simply as a case for taking climate change seriously misses the depth of its critique — which extends to the whole “technological paradigm” of our civilization, all the ways (economic and cultural) that we live now.

This is a document aligned with the scientific consensus on climate that excoriates the modern scientific mindset as, in effect, a 500-year mistake. It’s a document calling for global action, even a “new world political authority,” that’s drenched in frank contempt for the existing global leadership class. It’s a document that urges a rapid move away from fossil fuels while explicitly criticizing the leading avenue for doing so — a cap-and-trade regime — as too “quick and easy,” too compromised by greed and self-interest, to “allow for the radical change which present circumstances require.”

And while it includes hopeful passages, the encyclical’s most pungent lines are apocalyptic: “Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth.”

This pungency is what really distinguishes “Laudato Si’” from prior papal documents.

Francis’ predecessors attempted versions of his double pitch — urging Roman Catholics to recognize environmental devastation as a manifestation of the individualism the church has long condemned, while inviting secular readers to consider religious alternatives to our present way of life. But its urgency, sweep, and apocalyptic flavor may make “Laudato Si’” more immediately influential, more likely to make both audiences think anew.

However, its catastrophism also leaves this pope more open to empirical criticism. For instance, he doesn’t grapple sufficiently with evidence that the global poor have become steadily less poor under precisely the world system he decries — a reality that has complicated implications for environmentalism.

Nor are questions related to population growth successfully resolved. If resource constraints are really as severe as the pope implies, and technological solutions as limited in power, it isn’t entirely clear how the planet can sustain the steadily growing population the Catholic vision of marriage and fecundity implies. To credibly make the case that a billions-strong human race can keep having large families, you might need a more, well, dynamist view of the human future than this encyclical contains.

Finally, it’s possible to believe that climate change is happening while doubting that it makes “the present world system ... certainly unsustainable,” as the pope suggests. Perhaps we’ll face a series of chronic but manageable problems instead; perhaps “radical change” can, in fact, be persistently postponed.

Indeed, perhaps our immediate future fits neither the dynamist nor the catastrophist framework.

We might have entered a kind of stagnationist position, a sustainable decadence, in which the issues Pope Francis identifies percolate without reaching a world-altering boil.

In that case, the deep critique our civilization deserves will have to be advanced without the threat of imminent destruction. The arguments in “Laudato Si’” will still resonate, but they will have to be structured around a different peril: Not a fear that the particular evils of our age can’t last, but the fear that actually, they can.

Ross Douthat joined The New York Times as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009. Previously, he was a senior editor at the Atlantic and a blogger for theatlantic.com.

ROSS DOUTHAT

Comment

Rural Oregon should seriously consider secession

Rural Oregonians in general and Eastern Oregonians in particular are growing increasingly dismayed by the manner in which Oregon’s legislature and Oregon’s urban dwellers have marginalized their values, demonized their lifestyle, villainized their resource-based livelihoods, and have classified them as second class citizens at best. All the while they cover Oregon’s most fertile and well-watered farm ground with urban sprawl, gangs, illegal aliens, homeless camps, welfare tramps, and touchy-feely politics that add little or no value to rural lifestyles. Meanwhile Oregon’s rural residents carve out a resource-based living on marginal farm ground and the leftovers of Oregon’s economic growth, infrastructure and technological innovation.

The Portland metro area is home to 47 percent of Oregon’s voters and covers a mere 3776.41 square miles of Oregon’s 98,466 square miles — that’s less than 4 percent of its land mass, 3.83 percent to be exact.

Five of Oregon’s 36 counties now control 100 percent of Oregon’s legislative activity. None are rural. None are east of the Cascades. None are outside the Willamette valley.

It would appear to any rural resident or outside observer that most of Oregon’s urbanites view Oregon’s rural residents as

nothing more than third world inhabitants occupying their weekend and vacation playgrounds in what they advertise to the world as Oregon’s unique diversity. The political diversity in this state is becoming unpalatable.

Since 1988 Oregon’s urban dwellers have elected a group of individuals that represent nothing short of an aristocracy of political power. They have switched their role in democracy from servant to lord. These people have successfully disenfranchised and subjugated the people occupying everything not Portland or the Willamette Valley. They have enacted laws with little or no debate and no amendments. They have stated they will fix admittedly flawed laws after they are enacted; this is backwards legislative procedure designed to exclude and silence opposition, oftentimes with out-of-state money from East Coast power brokers.

Time for a change. Time to organize. Time to secede or succumb. Thirty-one counties need to put an initiative on their ballot that states: “Should (my) county secede from the state of Oregon and seek a more perfect union elsewhere?”

Imagine for a moment Idaho’s western border stretching to the Pacific and the state of Oregon shrinking to less than 4,000 square miles of land-locked, river view property.

Grant Darrow
Elgin

Export-Import Bank must go

The reauthorizing of the Export-Import Bank, established in 1934, will sunset on June 30. Originally the Ex-Im Bank was sold as a way to help American exporters. Instead it has become the vehicle for cronyism and corruption.

Supporters of the Ex-Im Bank claim it is vital for exports, helps small businesses, and supports tens of thousand jobs. The reality couldn’t be further from the truth. Here are some facts which supporters of the bank seem to ignore:

1. Just three companies (Boeing, General Electric, and Caterpillar) received 87 percent of loan guarantees from the Ex-Im Bank in fiscal year 2013.
2. The Ex-Im Bank provides exporting financing for less than one out of every 11,000 American small businesses.
3. The vast majority of exporters, 98 percent, do not receive assistance from the bank.
4. Export financing doesn’t create new

jobs, it merely redistributes job across America.

5. There are 31 corruption and fraud investigations into the Ex-Im Bank.
6. The top beneficiaries of the Ex-Im Bank also have massive backlogs of orders, meaning jobs would not be lost.
7. Ex-Im subsidies benefit China, Cuba and Russia. State-owned foreign airlines have received \$16 billion in financing since 2009.
8. The companies advocating for reauthorizing of the Ex-Im Bank have admitted they do not actually need it.

Eliminating the Ex-Im bank would level the playing field and allow all U.S. companies to compete on their own merits rather than being politically connected to the bank. Representative Greg Walden should stand up for the little guy and end corporate welfare by voting against any reauthorizing of the Export-Import Bank!

Donald Crawford
Klamath Falls

LETTERS POLICY

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