

Communicating Hope Conference – Jane Mellett (DRAFT)

Christian Hope in the Face of the Climate Crisis

In our contemporary world, marked by environmental degradation and social injustice, Christian hope emerges not as passive optimism but as an active, transformative force. Rooted in the resurrection of Christ, this hope inspires believers to engage with the world's challenges, trusting in God's promise of renewal, restoration and justice. When Pope Francis announced this year's Jubilee of Hope, he highlighted the threefold relationship that needed restoration – our relationship with God, with our sisters and brothers around the world and with the Earth itself. This certainly rings true in the work of Trócaire as we respond to multiple crises in our world today, specifically in relation to the climate crisis. In the short space today, I'd like to offer some thoughts on Christian Hope in the face of the climate crisis.

Our values in Trocaire have their roots in Catholic Social Teaching (CST) which provides that moral framework that intertwines faith with action. It emphasises the dignity of every human person, the common good, solidarity, and care of creation. These principles are particularly significant today where climate change disproportionately affects the poor and most vulnerable. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis described the climate and biodiversity crises as a "grave moral issue" threatening human life and dignity. He called for an "integral ecology" that recognises the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental issues. He emphasises humanity's responsibility to care for creation, noting that "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience." (LS, 217)

But in the midst of such constant bad news in relation to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the continuous failure of global and national politics to take the urgent action necessary, one can despair. We hear of the rise in climate fatigue and anxiety, particularly amongst young people. In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis asks us "to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it." (LS, 19). He invites us into a personal conversion experience, where we reconnect with nature, hear creation's cry to us but also to hear creation's song. And, through this process we are asked to reflect on our gifts and talents in order to discern where each of us are being called to act. Because Christian hope is not escapism or some vague feeling that 'it'll be grand'. Hope is brought about through action, and I find this to be true on a daily basis, it is something that is *brought about*. The climate activist Greta Thunberg knows this too, she says, "Hope is found in action, if you are looking for hope, look for action, then and only then the hope will come." Someone else I draw inspiration from is the author and teacher Joanna Macey, who invites us to reflect on where we are being asked to turn up to at this moment in our human story. In her book, *'Active Hope – How to Face the Mess we are in without going crazy'*, she asks three questions of us:

- What do I need to turn up to in order to bring about hope?

- What do I need to turn away from?
- What do I need to turn towards?

For example, we all turned up here today to talk about communicating Christian hope. That is an *act* in the pursuit of hope. When I think of the climate crisis there are many things we need to turn away from as individuals, as a society and a global community – e.g. single use plastic, fossil fuels, the widespread destruction of very fabric of God’s creation. We need to turn towards the technologies available to us which will bring about cleaner energy, practices which will help us all walk more gently on the earth. We need to turn towards a nourishing ecological spirituality which can help us to reconnect with God and with creation. I think about the Irish Bishops’ call to return 30% of church grounds back to nature – an action we can all be involved in at the grassroots (pardon the pun) which will contribute to the greater good of all God’s creatures, including people in local communities. Take for example, in Killaloe Diocese, 17 parishes have teamed up with their local biodiversity officer to bring about this initiative locally, bringing groups together to help restore biodiversity locally. This is hope in action.

It is too easy to give into cynicism and despair. To be honest, we don’t have time for despair. A phrase I heard recently, stopped me in my tracks: that it is a great privilege to lose hope, it is a privilege of the Global North because most people in our world do not have that privilege, they are living on the edge of existence and fighting for their very survival. “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.” (LS, 229).

I will insert some information here on our partner organisations – brief.

Laudato Si’ reminds us that in all of this, “The Creator does not abandon us; ... Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.” (LS,13)

Even in times of ecological and climatic crises, each of us has the power to make a difference and contribute to building a more sustainable future. Yes, there is an urgent need for huge systematic changes from our governments, but “*there are no lasting changes without cultural changes ... and there are no cultural changes without personal changes*” (LD 70). The planet is everyone’s responsibility. “All it takes is one good person to restore hope!” — Laudato Si’, 71.

Finish with some reflections on hope from LS:

“Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start.” — Laudato Si’, 205

“Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.” — *Laudato Si’, 244

“Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems.” Laudato Si’, 61.