

Dissatisfaction without escape

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In recent years, some very good cautions have emerged concerning talk of “heavenly cities” and dissatisfaction with our “earthly” home. Preaching in such a way that emphasizes a city to come brings with it a host of dangers. It can fall prey to a “pie in the sky” mentality, reinforcing unjust structures on earth by promising eschatological compensation. It can also have deleterious environmental consequences: if the earth is going to pass away, what’s the point of taking care of it?

These are genuine dangers. However, the letter to the Hebrews’ picture of faith—expressed in a kind of restlessness with the world as it is, and a subsequent longing for a heavenly city—does not *have* to fall prey to these pitfalls. Dissatisfaction with the world as we experience it does not need to be quickly resolved with escapist theologies. It can instead provide both fuel for change and consolation in the face of suffering.

A mother who weeps for a stillborn baby is an exemplar of “holy dissatisfaction” with the world as it is. So are the Catholic sisters who protest nuclear proliferation. In both cases, Christian hope that a better world is not only possible but *in fact coming* becomes the ground on which the imagination senses new possibilities for wonder—and action.

In our eschatological hope, action and waiting—dissatisfaction and hope—are blessedly inextricable from each other. It is part of the beauty of the faith.