

Environment, Faith, and Corporate Influence

by Cassandra Carmichael and Rebecca Barnes-Davies

In one of the *Bible's* most disarming stories, Jesus enters the Temple area, drives out all the merchants and overturns the tables of the money changers. Churches seek to emulate Jesus' ministry—a ministry attuned to poverty and striving to turn the tables on unjust societal powers. However, living in a world based on the bottom line and corporate influence, churches still get caught in the struggle of corporate power and global wealth. Individual pastors, churches, and national offices all struggle with "speaking truth to power."

Churches often face the challenge of providing for those in need with limited church resources. Churches also need to balance their nurture of all members and a righteous challenge for all people to live simply. How do churches pastor CEOs as well as non-profit Executive Directors? How do churches spread a message of justice and condemnation of some people or institutions while spreading a message of unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness?

Corporations directly impact these struggles. Corporate powers try to influence mainline churches on many levels—to buy products or services, to change stances on corporate divestment, and to be a partner rather than a critic of the gross accumulation of wealth around the world. Whether it's local or national, the global economy is encroaching, or at least trying to encroach, on local communities of faith. A gospel of wealth, of deserved accumulation of material goods, and of unchecked consumption can be heard in many pulpits across the nation.

Yet, ecojustice—ecological health and wholeness together with social and economic justice—is intrinsically a part of Christian scriptures, theology, and practice. Christian communities have every reason to be active in the call to ecojustice. The problem is that many Christians today, used to a gospel of wealth and unfamiliar with a gospel of ecojustice, would be hard pressed to articulate how and why our faith leads us to work for justice. This problem stems from the reality that in the church, those who are in power have been the ones writing the history. Fortunately, other voices in scripture and in tradition, have refused to be silenced.

Our job is to help uncover these biblical, theological, and ethical

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voices that urge us as Christians to work for justice—for the earth, all people, and creatures. It is our calling to live in hope, to preach good news, and to extend love to all while also preaching sustainable personal lifestyle changes and corporate accountability. We are finding ways to challenge ourselves and the world with this eco-justice gospel, confident that our faith impels us to work for justice and to struggle for sustainable conditions for all on earth.

Inspired by this gospel message, Christians across the nation are working for ecojustice. A few examples of the ways we witness this good news springing up in Christian churches across the country include:

- teaching Bible studies on ecojustice, simple living and lifestyle changes;
- worshipping around a theme of caring for God's creation;
- planning outdoor activities and service projects such as local stream clean-ups or collecting electronic waste for recycling;
- demanding environmental protection for migrant farmworkers;
- showing popular global warming movies and seeking to influence public policy on global warming;
- landscaping church grounds with native plants, rain water gardens, beneficial insect gardens, vegetable gardens (with produce going to local food banks), compost bins;
- designing buildings with green roofs and solar panels; and
- conducting environmental and energy audits and committing to the proposed changes.

In pews, pulpits, and public politics a new gospel is being preached and heeded in Christian churches across America. We hope and pray that this good news spreads as far and wide as did the message that began Christianity, and that indeed we can be a part of justice rising around the world.

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