

# Toward An Ecumenical Movement for Democratic Trade that Protects Communities and Nature

by Nancy Price

Since the "Battle in Seattle," the impact of "free trade" on jobs and wages in the U. S. is more commonly recognized and experienced. The general public, however, still has little understanding, of just how undemocratic, even, perhaps, unconstitutional, trade agreements are when multinational corporations can sue over laws that protect communities, public health, labor and the environment in order to promote corporate profits and investor rights. Is it possible, however, that the reality of global warming could be a catalyst that will bring people of many different political and religious ideologies together against "free trade"?

While scientists amass and analyze evidence for the causes and threats of global warming, people everywhere observe and experience real impacts. Arctic and Pacific Island communities have to abandon villages to thawing ice and rising seas. Subtle changes with cumulative impacts finally become apparent, such as earlier springtimes and migrations. Every example drives home the connection between people and nature and how we must break the strangle-hold corporate leaders and business groups have on national policy and politics.

Understanding the connection between people and nature was fundamental to the environmental movement of the 1960s and '70s. By the 1980s, however, James Watt and Ronald Reagan began to demonize environmentalists arguing that laws to protect people's health and the environment; federal public lands from private logging and mining; and endangered species from development were anti-American, anti-capitalist and anti-jobs. Environmentalists were labeled as liberals in contrast to conservatives who believed in no regulation, free markets and small government. As the evangelical community engaged with the conservative political movement, if you were for the environment you were against God.

Now, though, as Bill Moyers' show, *Is God Green?*, reports, "a new holy war is growing within the conservative evangelical community, with implications for both the global environment and American politics. For years liberal Christians and others have made protection of the environment a moral commitment. Now a number of conservative evangelicals are joining the fight, arguing that man's stewardship of the planet is a biblical imperative and calling for action to stop global warming." Today, then, we are witness to an emergent ecumenical



photo: ReligiousWitness.org

menical movement based on a concept of stewardship as many churches address global warming and its impact on people and the environment each from a different theological basis.

In this changing political reality, states are asserting their rights in the face of federal inaction on global warming. States recently highlighted this case by arguing before the Supreme Court that the Federal Environmental Protection Agency can regulate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions under the Clean Air Act. This action reveals the crisis in jurisdiction between the federal government's inaction due to corporate influence, on the one hand, and state governments that are responsive to public pressure, on the other hand.

Such a crisis is also fundamental to the free trade agreements that trump local, state and even national sovereignty over law-making and enforcement. How will CEOs of multinational corporations respond when communities, states and/or the federal government pass and/or enforce laws to curb global warming? How will religious principles of stewardship of the environment be enacted, if corporate profits and investor rights must be protected first? Could it be that many religious and political groups will come together in a broad ecumenical movement to take on corporate hegemony and rule and fight for democratic trade that respects the rights of communities and nature? If so, indeed, the implications for American politics will be profound.

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## "Is God Green?"

Last Fall, Bill Moyers' PBS special, *Is God Green?* sent shock waves through the Christian Faith. The promo for the show points out that:

"Is God Green?" explores how a serious split among conservative evangelicals over the environment and global warming could reshape American politics.

Check out this important program at [www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/green/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/green/index.html) You can get the transcript at [www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/print/isgodgreen\\_transcript\\_print.htm](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/print/isgodgreen_transcript_print.htm)