



Let Them Have Dominion

By Karri Munn-Venn

For many of us, living a life in harmony with God's great Earth is central to our Christian calling. The majority of us, however, go about the tasks of daily life oblivious to the cries of creation. Or worse, we are aware, but unwilling to take the action required to respond to injustices suffered by the Earth.

In conversation with lay people and clergy from a number of Christian denominations, I have seen that ideas about how we are called to relate to the Earth vary greatly. In considering these descriptions, we are invited to reflect on our relationship with the Earth both personally and communally.

Dominion

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." Genesis 1:28

We are lords, masters, and conquerors of nature. We have the scientific and technological knowledge and capacity to control the Earth.

Stewardship

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." Genesis 2:15

We are domineering-but-benevolent "land managers" of a planet that has been entrusted to us by God. We are superior be-

ings, instructed to rule over the plants, animals, and the ground beneath them.

Creation Care

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." Psalm 24:1

We are shapers of creation, but also dependent upon it for our survival. We are called to preserve the life systems that God has created. As an integral part of those life systems, we are called to be co-creators with God in our time.

Co-Habitation

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." Romans 8: 22 – 23

We are co-habitants of the larger community of living beings, living in harmonic relationship with creation. The individual and communal elements of our social concerns are integrated to sustain all of creation.

Covenant

"This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth." Genesis 9: 12 – 13

God invites us to a multi-faceted relationship with and joint responsibility for creation, shared with all forms of life. As humans, we are bound together with creation in a familial-like community of mutual responsibility and compassion.

Creation Advocacy

"May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works — who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord." Psalm 104: 31 – 34

Based on a connection with creation (plants, animals, and landscapes of the Earth), we emulate God's love for the Earth, listening faithfully and acting courageously to protect and heal creation through prophetic witness and action.

How do you see your relationship with the Earth? Do any of these concepts resonate with you? How might you define a Christian relationship with creation? What kind of relationship do you aspire to have? What prevents you from taking action?

Karri Munn-Venn is a Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice. The concepts explored in this piece are based on reflections from CPJ's *Living Ecological Justice*.

CPJ on the Road



In February, **Joe Gunn** and CPJ Board Member **John Murphy** met with Halifax Mayor **Mike Savage** (left) and City Councillor **Jennifer Watts**. Joe also led workshops on *Living Ecological Justice* at All Nations Christian Reformed Church in Halifax and at the Bethany Centre in Antigonish, NS.

Joe then spent a week in southwestern Ontario. He gave a workshop called “Stepping Up to the Plate: Faith Communities and Ecological Justice in Canada” in Chatham, and he also met with CPJ members and partners in London, Waterloo, and Brantford to discuss the connection between CPJ’s work and local issues.

CPJ’s new book, *Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis*, has been put to good use by many faith communities interested in exploring how they can live into their commitment to care for creation. CPJ staff members **Karri Munn-Venn** and **JoAnne Lam** have led workshops with church leaders, CPJ supporters, and members of the public in Ottawa at the Centretown Churches Social Action Committee, Kairos Spirituality-for-Social Justice Centre, and St. Peter’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, and in Toronto at the Canadian Council of Churches.

If you are interested in learning more about ecological justice or how your church can engage in creation care and advocacy, please contact Karri at 613-232-0275 ext. 223 or karri@cpj.ca. We are pleased to offer workshops, presentations, sermons, or Bible studies. And make sure to order your copy of *Living Ecological Justice* at cpj.ca/lej!

Budget 2014: Canada Disowns the Podium

Though Christians across Canada have advocated for change, Budget 2014 gave those concerned with poverty, climate change, and refugees little to cheer for. In our annual federal budget analysis, CPJ considered how the government’s goal of eliminating Canada’s financial deficit left unnecessary social and environmental deficits. Read our full response and press release at cpj.ca.

Public Justice Internship

Are you passionate about social justice issues? Are you looking for a chance to apply your university education to pressing issues and current questions?

CPJ’s Public Justice Internship Program provides a recent graduate with the opportunity to join us in Ottawa for one year. Through writing articles, researching policies, and engaging in dialogue with senior policy staff, the intern will become better equipped to challenge issues of injustice in Canada. Applications will be accepted until March 30 for this full-time, paid position. For more information, visit cpj.ca/careers.

Welcome to CPJ!



CPJ is excited to welcome **Janelle Vandergrift** as our new Socio-Economic Policy Analyst. Janelle will coordinate our research and writing on poverty and co-lead the *Dignity for All* campaign.

Throughout this winter semester, CPJ has been pleased to have **Ben Pasha** interning with us. Ben is a Master of Social Work student from Carleton University and is working on ecological justice issues.

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Citizens for Public Justice’s mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God’s call for love, justice, and stewardship.

CPJ annual membership fee

includes *the Catalyst*:
\$50 / \$25 (low-income)

the Catalyst, a publication of Citizens for Public Justice, reports on public justice issues in Canada and reviews CPJ activities.

Spring 2014 (Volume 37, Number 1)
ISSN 0824-2062
Agreement no. 40022119
Editor: Brad Wassink

***the Catalyst* subscription:**
\$20 (three issues)

the Catalyst is also available electronically. If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy of *the Catalyst*, simply contact us at cpj@cpj.ca.

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New Year, New Rules for Refugees

By Ashley Chapman



Citizenship and Immigration Minister Chris Alexander knows where refugee sponsors and advocates stand on the government's recent policy shifts. December 10 marked Human Rights Day, and many churches, individuals, and organizations used the occasion to confront trends that place economic concerns above human protection. Leaders of the Anglican, Presbyterian, United, and Lutheran churches joined Canadian heavyweights like Sarah Polley, Lloyd Axworthy, and Lawrence Hill in issuing a statement on the government's waning respect for refugees' rights.

Sponsoring Family

The new year brought major changes for immigrants and refugees wanting to sponsor their parents or grandparents to come to Canada. A two-year moratorium on applications was imposed near the end of 2011 because of a backlog that resulted in eight-year wait times. The program was reopened this year on January 2, but with much stricter criteria and a cap of 5,000 applications (which was reached on February 3). The *Canada Gazette*, the official newspaper of the Government of Canada, announced the parental sponsorship changes last May with an impact statement that largely discussed "economic outcomes" and "processing efficiency." The new rules increase the minimum income level required to sponsor by 30 per cent, heighten proof of income requirements, and double the period of financial undertaking by the sponsor to an incredible 20 years.

"The new rules favour wealthy people and people with excellent paying jobs," says Rose Dekker, the Refugee Coordinator at World Renew. "Refugees do not usually fall into that category in their first years in Canada, so they will not be

able to meet the new requirements for sponsoring parents and grandparents who have been left behind in their countries of origin, or — in some cases — the country in which they took asylum as refugees."

This is troubling, especially when it's lower-income refugees who could most benefit from extra familial supports such as live-in childcare.

Dependency Age Reconsidered

The parent and grandparent change was one of two economically driven sponsorship changes proposed for this January. Also posted in the *Gazette* was a change to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* age of dependency, from 21 and under to 18 and under, as well as an end to the exemption for full-time students above the age of dependency. This means that a refugee family would have to decide whether safety in Canada is worth leaving their nineteen-year-old son or daughter behind in a potentially life-threatening situation.

This change was front-of-mind for many at the Canadian Council for Refugees' Fall Consultation last November. Refugee settlement workers explained the gendered dangers this would create in countries where women are oppressed. Because women may not be permitted to work outside the home, unmarried daughters could be forced to marry to avoid destitution.

One settlement worker recounted a situation under the current age of dependency where a 22-year-old was the only remaining family member left in a brand new country (the neighbouring country where the family fled to make their refugee claim). The family pleaded

with Citizenship and Immigration for an exemption to no avail. Ironically, it was only when the daughter attempted suicide that her situation improved. Because of her "mental condition," she was able to be considered a dependent and join her family in Canada.

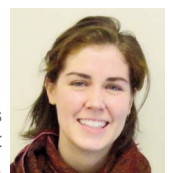
Advocacy Vital

Surprisingly, refugee claimants with children aged 19 to 21 were given an early Christmas present — at least for now. On December 20, a notice was quietly posted to a government website stating that the proposed age of dependency changes would not take effect in early January. This was welcome news, but those in the refugee settlement community were unsure whether the changes had been cancelled or postponed — and it now looks as if the latter is the case.

Still, the government's about-face on the age of dependency is reminiscent of the 2012 refugee health program cuts, which were unexpectedly scaled back the day before they came into effect. Although the scaled-back cuts were (and still are) widely opposed, they would have been even more comprehensive, also cutting health care to refugees specifically selected to come to Canada by the government. When questioned, then minister Jason Kenney said the last-minute change was to fix a wording error and that government-assisted refugees were never actually at risk of losing their coverage. But documents and emails obtained through an Access to Information request show otherwise: the last-minute change was partially due to the potential for public pushback.

It's a reminder that even in a time when Canada's immigration policy is focused more on economic concerns than human protection, there is a role for advocacy. The voices of refugees and their advocates can still be heard.

A similar version of this article first appeared in the January 27 issue of the *Christian Courier*.



Ashley Chapman is the Public Justice Intern at Citizens for Public Justice.

The Recession Lives On

By Brad Wassink



Though the recession hit hard in 2008, we often cite 2009 as the year when markets rebounded and our recovery began. Still, almost five years later, that recovery has not reached everyone in Canada. For about 3 million low-income Canadians, the impact of the recession remains.

“Making Ends Meet” is CPJ’s fourth and final report in the *Poverty Trends Scorecard* series. It reveals that while the incomes of Canada’s poor have stagnated or fallen, the costs of many essential goods and services have skyrocketed.

Stagnant Incomes

The income side of the equation was detailed in our previous reports and has several root causes, including unemployment, the rise of precarious employment, and static wages at the bottom of the earning scale. Throughout the recession, from February 2008 to July 2009, Canada’s employment rate (or the percentage of working-age Canadians with jobs) dropped from 63.8 per cent to 61.3 per cent, not far from where it sits today (61.6 per cent). During that same time, temporary jobs have grown at two to three times the rate of permanent jobs while the poorest 20 per cent of households have seen their after-tax income decline by 1.3 per cent.

Couple that with a 6.7 per cent increase in the consumer price index, and the

constant grind to get by is made that much harder. Cost of living increases, especially for food, shelter, and education, have a much harsher impact on those with low incomes than on those with high incomes. These three budget items make up nearly half of spending for the bottom quintile of households, but barely constitute more than a quarter of spending for the top quintile.

Cost of Living

As rising house prices continue to preclude more and more Canadians from homeownership, there’s added pressure put on the rental market. And it’s not just in big cities like Vancouver and Toronto. Newfoundland & Labrador, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have seen the largest rental housing price increases since the recession. As a result, the supply of affordable and rent-geared-to-income housing can’t meet the growing demand. The average wait times for subsidized housing range from 16 months in Vancouver to 10 years for singles and childless couples in Ontario.

Similarly, food banks are struggling to keep up with the spike in clients since the recession. Food prices have risen 13.1 per cent since 2008. Last year, 833,000 people in Canada turned to food banks in the month of March alone, a significant increase from 676,000 in March of 2008. Children consistently represent over a third of food bank users.

Equally disconcerting are the barriers faced by poor children in the education system. Education is hailed as the ticket out of poverty, but it’s becoming more difficult to access for many low-income people. It’s not just college and university tuition rates that are barriers. In Ontario’s public education system, about half of elementary schools charge extra fees for extracurricular activities and lunchtime programs, while 91 per cent charge fees for field trips. These added costs act as barriers to full participation for low-income students, entrenching the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Significant action is needed to assist low-income Canadians still struggling to make ends meet. The *Dignity for All* campaign is crafting a model poverty elimination strategy with measures to increase income security and assistance for low-wage, precarious workers as well as proposals to boost investments in affordable housing, healthy food, childcare, and access to education. These policy recommendations have been drafted collaboratively at *Dignity for All* policy summits, including our recent summit on health (see the article on page 5).

Work for public justice continues year round. We can all play a role in reminding governments of their responsibility to implement the necessary public policy levers to help low-income Canadians emerge from the recession that — five years later — still lives on.

Take Action

Has your MP signed on to the Dignity for All Campaign? Check the list of endorsements at dignityforall.ca and encourage your MP to join!

Read the full “Making Ends Meet” report at cpj.ca/reports. The report is comprised of five two-page fact sheets focusing on the rising costs of housing, food, and education.

Brad Wassink is the Communications Coordinator at Citizens for Public Justice.



Health as a Public Good: Thinking Broadly, Acting Locally

By Lori Kleinsmith

I work as a health promoter at a Community Health Centre. Our centre provides primary care, community development, and other health services to clients who are often marginalized and stigmatized by poverty, homelessness, addictions, or trauma. Our clients' stories offer powerful insight into the way social and economic factors affect a person's health status. Known as the social determinants of health, these factors include social exclusion, early childhood development, and unemployment.

I often work with people struggling with inadequate and unaffordable housing, reliance on food banks, and employment barriers. I recently spoke with a client who became homeless as a result of losing his job and having his Employment Insurance delayed.

It's not smoking, physical inactivity, or the health care system that impacts one's health the most; it's poverty. As a health promoter, my role is to help clients gain greater control over decisions and actions affecting their health. However, living with the toxic stress of poverty creates little to no opportunity for empowerment, control, or stability.

In *Social Determinants of Health: the Canadian Facts* (see www.thecanadianfacts.org), Dr. Dennis Raphael writes that the major determining factors of Canadians' health "are not medical treatments or lifestyle choice but rather the living conditions they experience." Dr. Raphael explains that addressing the many underlying social and economic conditions will create the circumstances for empowerment and, ultimately, better health.

Dr. Raphael was one of several presenters at the recent "Health as a Right and Public Good" policy summit organized by *Dignity for All: the campaign for a poverty-free Canada*. The summit provided an opportunity to expand our centre's knowledge of the work being done federally on health and poverty issues and to connect it to our local work. The two-day meeting included presentations from health experts followed by discussions on policy recommendations for mental health, pharmacare, medicare, refugee health care, Aboriginal health, and the social determinants of health.



Martha Jackman from the University of Ottawa speaking at the summit.

Connecting the necessary public policy changes with our clients' everyday situations is not easy, but our centre strives to bring a big picture understanding to our local-level work. This approach helps educate and mobilize our community toward actions that address the social determinants of health. Some examples from our community health centre include:

- A "Do the Math" Challenge where 90 participants lived on a diet of packaged food bank staples for three days. The initiative raised awareness about the failure of food banks to address root causes of poverty and about the need to raise social assistance rates.
- Self-advocacy skill-building workshops and the formation of community action groups for people with personal experience of poverty.
- Anti-poverty advocacy through social media, public presentations, articles, petitions, and meetings with politicians.

At the *Dignity for All* summit, Dr. Raphael's presentation nicely summed up many issues involved in addressing poverty and health in Canada. He described Canada as "a leader on researching the social determinants of health but a laggard on action and public policy implementation." He highlighted reasons for this including a lack of media coverage, a lack of leadership by both governing and opposition

parties, and the corporate domination of our public policy agenda.

The health-related policy recommendations carved out at the summit will become part of a model national poverty plan that will also include positions on housing, food security, and employment. As a participant in the drafting process, I was able to share experiences from my clients and hear what needs to happen on a national level to make an impact. In turn, I will be able to share the ideas from the national poverty plan with my community and mobilize support through action groups and the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network.

The connections between health and poverty are clear, as are the public policies needed to address them. The challenge is translating these connections in a meaningful way for Canadians to better understand and support. In this way, community-based advocacy work is critical.

Lori Kleinsmith is a Health Promoter at Bridges Community Health Centre in Port Colborne, Ontario.



Stop Profiting from the Wreckage!

By Nicole Armstrong



Climate change is one of the most important environmental issues of our time. In order to limit climate change, we need to start weaning ourselves off fossil fuels. This may sound like an overwhelming battle for the global community, but one effective approach may be for churches and other institutions to divest from coal, oil, and gas company shares.

The goal is to force the hand of fossil fuel companies to promote renewable energy and to pressure governments to enact legislation that keeps fossil fuels in the ground. If successful, this strategy could cause fossil fuel companies to drastically reduce their carbon emissions and push governments to ban further drilling or to enact a carbon tax.

Last month, seventeen major American foundations announced that they will divest close to \$2 billion in philanthropic funds from fossil fuel companies. In addition, the president of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, expressed support for divestment at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

The United States has a growing number of institutions involved in fossil fuel divestment campaigns. Leading the movement are student groups on hundreds of university campuses, but Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, and Unitarian church bodies are also beginning to get involved.

To date, much less action has been taken in Canada. Sarah Mikhael, General Secretary of the Student Christian Movement Canada (SCM), says that many churches are still in the preliminary stages of looking into divestment. The SCM has decided to divest their endowments in fossil fuels and is encouraging churches and campus organizations to do the same. The United Church of Canada has applied a negative screen to its holdings, refusing to invest in alcohol, gambling, pornography, tobacco, and weapons — but not yet fossil fuels. In a campus-wide referendum this February, students at the University of British Columbia voted by a strong majority that their student-run Alma Mater Society should push the administration to divest its \$1 billion endowment fund from all fossil fuel holdings.

Similar campaigns are asking institutions to immediately freeze any new investment in fossil fuel companies and to divest from existing funds that include fossil fuel public equities or corporate bonds in the next five years. The inspiration and hope for these campaigns come from the success of the South Africa divestment campaign of the 1980s. Many institutions (including many Canadian churches) divested from companies with investments in South Africa. In doing so, they successfully pressured the government to end apartheid.

Yet despite the potential for impact, asking institutions to research the holdings of major companies and divest may seem like an uphill battle. The process has just become easier, however, thanks to a report by Richard Heede published in *Climatic Change*. Heede found that 90 companies are responsible for two-thirds of our greenhouse gas emissions to date. Many scientists and environmental advocates hope these findings will bring scrutiny and increased accountability to fossil fuel companies.

Still, institutions may fear financial loss as a result of divestment. But in “The Financial Case for Divestment of Fossil Fuel Companies by Endowment Fiduciaries,” Bevis Longstreth predicts that the future prospects for fossil fuel companies will suffer due to the growing awareness of the existential threat of climate change. Longstreth says that the largest 200 fossil fuel companies are severely overvalued in their trade markets, and that coal and oil are likely to become “stranded assets” on account of new developments in alternative energy sources. He explains that continuing to hold investments in any of these companies could actually result in great material loss.

Divestment brings many challenges and can be a long and difficult process, but it is crucial and it is urgent. Churches and other institutions have the opportunity to send a powerful message to fossil fuel companies and to our governments. If we don’t, global warming could increase as high as 5.3 degrees, resulting in devastating effects for us all. We need to stop profiting from those who are damaging our planet.

In February 2014, the congregation of Trinity St. Paul’s United Church in Toronto voted unanimously to ensure that its funds are not invested in any of the world’s 200 largest fossil fuel companies.

Nicole Armstrong is a student at Carleton University majoring in social work and was an intern at Citizens for Public Justice.



Income Splitting: A Contentious Debate within the Canadian Church

By Simon Lewchuk

Income splitting, also known as family taxation, would change the tax system so that it takes into account total family (rather than individual) income. It would allow higher income earners to transfer a portion of their annual income to the lower income partner to reduce the household's overall tax burden. The federal government has proposed income splitting for families with children under the age of 18, allowing them to shift up to \$50,000 a year in income between partners.



What are the arguments in favour?

Christian groups in favour of income splitting like the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada (IMFC) argue that the current tax system unfairly penalizes families who choose to have a parent stay at home or work in a lower-paying or part-time job. Some believe it creates a disincentive for parents to stay at home with their young children.

Families with one partner who makes significantly more than the other currently pay more tax than families with similar incomes spread more evenly between partners. For example, a family with two income earners each making \$40,000 would pay a total of \$12,000 (\$6,000 each) a year in federal income tax. A sole earner family where one person makes \$80,000 — the same total amount as the family in the first scenario — would pay \$14,080 in federal taxes since they would be in a higher tax bracket. Proponents maintain that this is unjust and that all families should be taxed equitably.

Who would benefit?

According to a 2014 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), families in the top 50 per cent of Canada's income distribution would receive 97 per cent of the benefits, while the bottom 50 per cent (those making under \$46,000 a year) would only receive 3 per cent.

Looking at this another way, the bottom 60 per cent (families making \$56,000 or less) would receive an average benefit of \$50 per year while the richest five per cent of all Canadian families (those who make over \$147,000) would receive an average annual benefit of \$1,100.

The IMFC suggests, however, that countries currently using family income splitting show that the measure could instead be designed to benefit lower and middle income families. In France, for example, single parents are able to split their income with children.

What do opponents say?

A large number of social policy organizations, including the CCPA and the Broadbent Institute, oppose income splitting. They argue that income splitting won't provide any benefit to single-parent families or to dual-income families where both partners are in the lowest tax bracket.

Some claim that income splitting promotes what they deem to be an outdated model of family with a primary breadwinner (presumably a man) and a stay-at-home spouse (presumably a woman). They feel income splitting would create a disincentive for some women to enter or remain in the workforce, as families with one high-income earner would see a significant increase in taxes if the second partner were to work. As a result, they believe it would represent a step backwards for gender equity.

How much would it cost?

The CCPA estimates that income splitting would cost the federal government \$3 billion annually in lost tax revenue, and an additional \$1.9 billion provincially. A study by the C.D. Howe Institute has similar findings, estimating that the cost would be \$2.7 billion federally and \$1.7 billion provincially.

Where do the political parties stand?

The Conservatives plan on introducing this measure once the federal budget is balanced, likely just before the 2015 election. However, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty has recently come out against income splitting, noting that it "benefits some parts of the Canadian population a lot and other parts of the Canadian population, virtually not at all."

The NDP and Liberals also oppose the government's current income splitting proposal, while the Green Party supported income splitting in their 2011 election platform.

What might public justice have to say about income splitting?

A public justice framework requires that we evaluate government policies and initiatives in terms of the common good rather than personal benefit. As such, we must seriously question any policy that disproportionately benefits the wealthy while significantly diminishing federal revenues and therefore the government's ability to carry out its own public justice tasks of reducing poverty and inequality, protecting the environment, and caring for the most vulnerable.

CPJ aims to promote a civil discourse that respects families' childcare choices and recognizes the value that stay-at-home parents contribute to society. At the same time, it is reasonable and fair for a progressive taxation system to place a slightly smaller tax burden on dual-income families due to their higher expenses (e.g. childcare, transportation, work-related costs, etc.).

At the end of the day, we need to evaluate whether the government's proposed income splitting measure makes the tax system more fair, accomplishes worthwhile policy goals, and is the best use of a significant amount of government revenue. In CPJ's view, it fails on all counts.



Simon Lewchuk is a Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice.

Jesus' Values Revolution

By David Pfrimmer

Last year, Pope Francis released his apostolic exhortation, “*Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel).” In discussing the Roman Catholic Church’s renewed sense of mission, Pope Francis highlighted “the structural causes of inequality” and reaffirmed the social teaching of the churches: “No to the economy of exclusion. No to the new idolatry of money. No to a financial system that rules rather than serves. No to inequality, which spawns violence.”

Many in the media interpreted the Pope’s assessment of capitalism as Marxism. Others suggested that his words reflected a growing public concern about the increasing influence of corporate power. Christians, however, may have heard in his address a return to the economics of Jesus. In wandering the Galilean countryside, Jesus called for a “values revolution” that changed how people viewed possessions and deployed power. But it also included a wisdom that offered hope to an occupied and excluded people.

Inequality is certainly a symptom of the darker side of the principalities and powers today. It is driven by changing demands for workers due to new technologies, the nature of global markets, and the knowledge economy. Globalization and free trade have been linked to the declining influence of labour unions, to stagnant incomes and wages for families, and to higher education requirements for almost any job. All these have contributed to growing disparity, but people are not simply poorer; they’re excluded from the economic and the social mobility necessary to pursue a better life.

Theologian Douglas Meeks has suggested we might well look to the *oikonomia tou theou* (economy of God) for a vision of possible alternatives. The “economy of God” is an economy of *enough* rather than an economy of *scarcity*. It assumes that basic human needs take priority over the consumer-driven desires or wants that placate us. The economy of God summons human generosity and understands human vulnerability as the basis for more authentic security for all.



Rev. Dr. Mishka Lysack speaking at CPJ's 50th anniversary event in Calgary.

As former Chilean Ambassador to the United Nations Juan Somavía aptly said to the World Summit on Social Development, “You cannot have secure nations full of insecure people.”

No economy can function without foundational values that inform, sustain, and hold its leaders accountable. In *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, Harvard philosopher Michael J. Sandal observes that we have yet to have a public debate over the kind of economy we want. As a result, he says, “We drifted from *having* a market economy to *being* a market society. The difference is this: A market economy is a tool – a valuable and effective tool – for organizing productive activity. A market society is a way of life in which market values seep into every aspect of human endeavor. It is a place where social relations are made over in the image of the market.”

Sandal’s analysis sounds much like the situation that faced the people of Galilee when social relations were being remade in the image of Rome. This brings us back to the economics of Jesus and his values revolution. Christians know something about values even if we frequently fail to live up to them. There have been numerous reports and many public calls

to address inequality. In these times, they all seem to fall on perpetually deaf ears among our political and economic leaders. Yet I would suggest that inequality is but one symptom of the wider problem – we have forgotten the importance of “belonging.” In Matthew 25, when Jesus “gathers *all the nations* of the world” on the day of judgement, he will say to them, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (vs 40).

There is an old Jewish proverb that says, “Where there is too much, something is missing!” The growing inequality of those who are being forgotten today – the least, the last, the lost, and the lonely – points to what is missing: a commitment to ensure that everyone has a place at the table. Jesus’ values revolution means that everyone belongs at the table in the household of God’s good creation. And for those to whom much has been given, much more will be expected to get everyone there!

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