



THE ROOTS OF THE CURRENT CRISES ARE SPIRITUAL

Report on the Forum on Faith and a Sustainable Economy

Commission on Justice and Peace, The Canadian Council of Churches

Parliament Hill - May 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches hosted a Forum on Faith and a Sustainable Economy on Parliament Hill, Ottawa on May 12, 2009. One of the key themes of the forum was that the roots of the current crisis – named as the poverty crisis, financial crisis, and environmental crisis – are spiritual.

Four panels resourced the Forum. The Community and Policy panel presented an overview of different aspects of the “state of the world” surrounding prospects for a sustainable economy. The Theology panel focused on theological and spiritual resources and perspectives which could help address the challenges heard in the first panel. An MP Roundtable (co-hosted by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and The Canadian Council of Churches) emphasized the importance and desirability of faith communities engaging in the public dialogue. The final session for the forum was an opportunity for church representatives and forum participants to reflect on the role of churches in addressing the crises of today.

Rich with expert content from KAIROS, The Assembly of First Nations, the Climate Action Network, and theologians from a variety of backgrounds and traditions, the Forum marked a new engagement of churches in Canada with Parliament Hill. Panellists called on the 100 plus participants, including MPs and Senators, to return to the work of spiritual formation to provide new insight to address the challenges of today’s world.

Book-ending the heavily resourced *Forum on Faith and a Sustainable Economy*, forum participants had the opportunity for more personal engagement and sharing through a dialogue and reflection program on *Reading the Signs of the Times*.

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THE COMMISSION ON JUSTICE AND PEACE

The Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches provides a forum for:

- sharing information and concerns among those involved in ecumenical work on peace and social justice in Canada and the world;
- reflecting biblically and theologically on peace and social justice, and
- facilitating the cooperation of the churches in peace and justice concerns.

FORUM CONTEXT

“Faith and a Sustainable Economy” is the main program area of the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches. The May 2009 Forum was designed to provide a firm policy and community analysis along with theological reflection on the three-fold crises of today: poverty in Canada, the global economic recession and the environment/ecology challenge.

Some theological entry points for the Forum were the following:

- Is the economy for humankind or is humankind made for the economy. What does it profit one, if one should gain the whole world, and lose one’s own soul? In a policy context, what is the scale of the crises Canada is facing, and in response to them how do we focus on the dignity of the human person and creation? We also recognize that traditional communities in Canada bring a different and helpful perspective to these challenges that may point out a helpful way forward.
- What particular gifts do churches bring, and what strategies can churches support that will contribute to the common good and a sustainable future? We need our leaders to be aware of some essential questions on the deep meaning of human endeavors, and we need some concrete steps to the future.

The forum was constituted in two parts:

- The main forum during the full day of Tuesday May 12, 2009 consisted of four panels which addressed different aspects of the Faith and Sustainable Economy theme: Community and Policy, Theology, Political, and Church.
- Book-ending the Forum on Monday night and Tuesday night was an Evening Circle Dialogue focused on reading the signs of the times.

BOOK-END #1 –READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Book-ending the heavily resourced *Forum on Faith and a Sustainable Economy*, forum participants had the opportunity for more personal engagement and sharing through a dialogue and reflection program on *Reading the Signs of the Times*. Sessions on the evenings prior to and just after the main forum were led by **Bill Ryan sj**, **Peter Bisson sj** and **Anne-Marie Jackson** of the [Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice](#).

The session prior to the day-long forum involved the participants getting to know each other better, building trust and understanding among the group and engaging participants in a guided dialogue which tapped into the heart as well as the head. They were encouraged to read what God was up to in the midst of these crises and to what the Spirit was calling them. It was a process that emphasizes deep listening. Participants discussed who they individually were by identifying a profound moment that shaped them. They named personal and global fears and similarly hopes. Participants then identified where they heard or felt the Spirit moving in the conversation which they had.

FORUM ON FAITH AND A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER

After opening prayers offered by several representatives of the Canadian Council of Churches, the Chair of the Commission on Justice and Peace **Joy Kennedy** welcomed everyone to the forum. She explained that the forum itself was an experiment of a way of further engaging member Churches in a politics of engagement. It was a focal point in a full week of the Churches presence in Ottawa including delegations visiting Party Leaders, Cabinet Ministers, and other political representatives.

MP Paul Dewar who sponsored the event on Parliament Hill, then also welcomed the participants.

COMMUNITY AND POLICY PANEL: COMMUNITY, CANADIAN AND GLOBAL ECONOMIC UPDATE

Moderator: Kathy Vandergrift, Christian Reformed Church in North America

- Bob Watts, Chief Executive Officer, Assembly of First Nations
- John Dillon, Program Coordinator, Global Economic Justice, KAIROS
- Graham Saul, Executive Director, Climate Action Network
- Judy Whiteduck, Director, Economic Partnerships, Assembly of First Nations

The first panel presented an overview of different aspects of the “state of the world” surrounding prospects for a sustainable economy. **Bob Watts** spoke to the relationship between First Nations and the environment as well as with other Canadians. In this context he recommended John Ralston Saul’s *A Fair Country*. Watts further spoke inspirationally about the contribution of First Nations history, traditions and spirituality to addressing a sustainable economy. Key among these is attempting to

balance ourselves with the environment/ creation around us: 'How can we find and pursue balance.' And further, how do we plan for seven generations – we need to think about future generations when we make decisions today.

John Dillon carefully and thoroughly reviewed the root causes of the current financial crisis. In particular, he identified the factors of globalized markets and speculative bubbles made possible by financial innovation. Risky financial practices, particularly based on the US dollar were not restrained by regulators and as a result speculative trade in 2002 was 35 times bigger than the real economy of goods and services. Ironically, and to their own detriment, developing countries are now lending foreign exchange reserves to developed countries at a low interest rate. Dillon identified several existing alternatives for a more international monetary system. The crisis has been identified as a “failure of moral conduct” by Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican’s Special Representative to the UN, and Rev. Sam Kobia of the World Council of Churches has called for “long term transformation based on sound ethical and moral principles which will govern a new financial architecture.”

Graham Saul graphically and with evangelistic fervor presented the impact of climate change around the world. He showed how polar ice is melting faster than predicted, resulting in rising sea levels which will impact sea-side cities, river deltas and millions of people. He also showed how climate change and man-made global warming will cause the extinction of millions of species. This is a global environmental justice problem, because many countries, including Canada, produce more emissions per person and the impact is felt disproportionately in the developing world. It is also an intergenerational justice problem because the impact will be felt by future generations more than our own. Saul ended his presentation with a personal moment about his own struggles to find theological resources to address climate change. He expressed his belief that churches were best placed to address the challenge of climate change both because of their theological resources and their wide spread both in Canada and the world.

Wrapping up this panel, **Judy Whiteduck**, outlined the work of the Economic Partnerships Portfolio of the Assembly of First Nations. The Portfolio deals with Economic Development, Labour Force Development and Connectivity. The range of issues included under these themes include: a corporate relations and partnership strategy; addressing resource revenue sharing; making first nations poverty history; human resource development; inter-nation trade (including, for example, with the Maori of New Zealand); and information technology and communications. Whiteduck also summarized how the Federal Stimulus Announcements might address First Nations concerns.

THEOLOGY PANEL: FAITH AND A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

Moderator: Grant Effer, The Salvation Army

- Keith Helmuth, theologian/economist, contributor to the new book, *Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy*
- Darlene O’Leary, theologian specializing in ethics and economics
- Roy Berkenbosch, theologian, Director Micah Centre, Kings’ University College Edmonton

The second panel was an opportunity to focus on theological and spiritual resources and perspectives which could help address the challenges heard in the first panel. **Keith Helmuth** began by drawing attention to the reality that the concept of “sustainable development” has meant “keeping the

economic growth machine on the road.” He suggested that instead we should be figuring out how to “develop sustainability” – how to live within the capacities of the earth’s capacities. Naming the current financial crisis as also a social and ecological crisis, Helmuth hoped that perhaps we are ready to address deeper questions which build on not only human solidarity but also solidarity at the ecological, whole earth level. Our religious traditions teach us that in right relationships we find true human meaning and the presence of the Divine. In moving forward then to developing sustainability, we need to recognize that “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, resilience, and beauty of the full commonwealth of life. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” Helmuth closed by calling for a movement like that which called into question the slave trade, one which would reset the moral compass of the political economy.

With her presentation, **Darlene O’Leary** built on the theme of the interconnectedness of the economy and ecology and the disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable. Since the economic crisis is a systemic one, she suggested, we need to take our theological principles, such as the dignity of the person, the option for the poor, the common good, and the integrity of creation and use them to seek a concrete systemic economic response. She illustrated this point with the economic analysis of Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan and his belief that “economies are ecologies.” Lonergan identified various “rhythms” of exchange in an economy and suggested that the concept of “adequacy” is what allows for the communal well-being of all in harmony with the rhythms of creation. O’Leary called for faith communities to engage in broad, public education about the relationship of deep theological principles and economic systems.

Roy Berkenbosch began with a story about his recent visit to Malawi where he witnessed distribution of food from the Canadian Food Grains Bank. He spoke about how the event was one of celebration and festivity, where those who received food also brought a contribution to the communal distribution. However, it also spoke to the urgent need for a sustainable economy: the people receiving food had been receiving it for years and expected to in the future; the maize they were receiving was not particularly nutritious and didn’t grow well in the area; not much was said about irrigation, economic reform, trade or other locally possible means of addressing chronic hunger. The future of the local people and their environment remained precarious. Berkenbosch then pointed out how the current economic crisis is also fundamentally one of despair – a lack of hope. And he contrasted that by reviewing the Biblical narrative as one that stresses the abundance and goodness of Creation and a sense of hopeful imagination leading to a Jubilee praxis.

LUNCHTIME MP ROUNDTABLE

Co-Hosted By The Canadian Council Of Churches And The Evangelical Fellowship Of Canada

Moderators: Mike Hogeterp, Vice-chair, Commission on Justice and Peace

Don Hutchinson, Director, Centre for Faith and Public Life, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

- Pierre Ducasse, Office of the Leader, New Democratic Party of Canada
- Rick Dykstra, MP, Conservative Party of Canada
- Yves Lessard, MP, Bloc Québécois
- John McKay, MP, Liberal Party of Canada

The panel of political representatives was asked to help the forum understand political engagement with the issues of faith and a sustainable economy and to suggest what role churches could play. **Pierre Ducasse** emphasized the faith roots of the New Democratic party and its birth in the social gospel. He spoke about how the economic crisis was a crisis of a particular kind of economy founded in greed. This is a moral issue which needs to redirect us to a focus on the real economy and a focus on cooperation rather than competition. Citing issues of consumer rights, poverty, housing, social programs, EI, international affairs, and energy, Ducasse suggested that they were all linked. People of faith have a critical role in addressing their moral interlinkages.

Rick Dykstra emphasized both the reality and importance of political parties working together, particularly in committee settings. He spoke to the important actions that his government had undertaken to address issues around the environment, poverty, international aid and unemployment. He also strongly encouraged personal contact between persons of faith and their political leaders, including through forums like this one. He suggested that such contact be as non-partisan as possible, have a succinct strategy and a key “ask.” With this approach he believed that churches and the state can find points of discussion and come together for action.

While suggesting that the annual presence of the churches on the Hill was a chance to bring politicians back to order once in a while, **Yves Lessard** said that his comments might also engender some concern. Poverty he stated is not an act of God and is not resolved simply by prayer. It is a consequence of the capitalist system, a system which cannot be eliminated but must be reformed. This is similarly a problem for the gap between rich and poor and the lack of sustainable development. What is needed is a change in the practices of business and individuals and the role of government. We need to take responsibility for “the other”-- for people. And we need to find a balance between humans and the environment. Lessard then gave an example of a business in Quebec which does not give bonuses to senior staff, but gives shares to its employees and works to reduce greenhouse gasses. These steps were taken because the owners are people of faith.

For **John McKay**, faith communities bring to political representatives a moral clarity. Being articulate on the issues before Parliament and addressing them through values informed by deep beliefs gives faith communities enormous moral force. McKay named Wilberforce, Bishop Tutu and Martin Luther King as examples. Moral clarity is what society, MPs and Senators need to today to address significant issues like poverty in Canada and around the world. He called for faith communities to inform decision-makers, to bring moral certainty and help show how beliefs drive values and lead to outcomes. He finally called for faith communities to be an inspiration for political representatives: “Inform, inspire, call us forth.”

In the discussion that followed it was clear that faith communities are heard most loudly and consistently by political representatives on issues related to sexuality, and not as consistently on for example poverty. The panelists also acknowledged that to address the poverty crisis in Canada, a joint action plan is what is required, rather than resolutions and promises.

SPOTLIGHTS

After lunch and as the afternoon began, the forum heard briefly about the work of and/or current campaigns of the following:

- [First Oikocredit Canada](#)
- [Citizens for Public Justice](#)
- [Evangelical Fellowship of Canada](#)
- [Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives](#)

CHURCH PANEL

Moderator: Joy Kennedy, Chair, Commission on Justice and Peace

- Bishop Mark McDonald, National Indigenous Anglican Bishop
- Marion Pardy, Vice-President, The Canadian Council of Churches
- John Jillions, Dean, Annunciation Orthodox Cathedral, Orthodox Church of America

The final session for the forum was an opportunity for church representatives and forum participants to reflect on the role of churches in addressing the crises of today. Three church representatives kicked off the discussion. **Bishop Mark McDonald** called for attention to the spiritual disciplines which would allow engaging the economy in balance with the environment. The current economy has its own spiritual discipline and as Ghandi suggested we need a spiritual revolution. Reflecting on an aboriginal leader in the North, McDonald identified four aspects of such a spiritual revolution: remember we are people of the land, interact with the larger economy for the good of the people, be consistent with traditional aboriginal values, and balance with the creation.

Marion Pardy through Biblical reflection, suggested that core to the nature of God is that God hears the cries of God's people – all of God's people. The stories of Ishmael and Hagar, and of Moses first tending the flocks and then the helpless in society, are examples for us – we too are called to be God's feet and hands. "Righteousness" in Biblical terms is "setting things right." It is to this that we are called.

Recalling his grandparents, who went through very difficult times, yet showed remarkable strength, **John Jillions** suggested that faith traditions have resources for these difficult times. They give a strength that allows people to flourish in difficult times, to have peace in the midst of crises.

With these initial reflections, the forum participants broke into small discussion groups to reflect on the following questions:

- What messages of hope and transformation do churches offer to the public dialogue?
- What policy proposals grow the dignity of the human person and strengthen care for creation?
- What does it profit us if we should gain the whole world and lose our own soul?

Some of the reflections from forum participants included the following:

- Our lifestyles themselves are a kind of sacred cow. How do our individual lifestyles play a role in the suffering and death and destruction of the environment? How can we make incremental change? How can we as church leaders model a different lifestyle?
- MPs don't hear about poverty or the environment when they come to the doors of constituents. We need to think about how to get church members to have poverty and the environment at top of mind so that the message to MPs is as strong as the persistent widow.
- We should remember that the themes of today are not new; churches have for many years challenged the ideology of the times. We need to retell the history of what the churches have

done. We have an educational challenge in helping people understand again today what is happening economically and ecologically. We need to do ethics in the public arena and practice the hard work of this kind of analysis.

The church panelists then gave final reflections for the day: **John Jillions** asked what particular gifts churches can bring to the crises of today. He answered that for the Orthodox being human means a “freely chosen communion with God and Creation and each other.” This then will impact our vision of a sustainable economy. He further suggested that the government and churches together need to uphold three forms of this communion: charitable (we need training and ecumenical cooperation to continue in service and sacrifice), prophetic imagination (imagine the world differently and be counter-cultural) and eschatological (a thirst for the world to come, as a way to give hope and sustain us in tough times today).

Four sources of hope and transformation were offered by **Marion Pardy**. 1) Digging into our sacred texts where we will discover that “lack of righteousness” – “injustice” breaks the heart of God and, thus, our hearts. We then receive the passionate strength and commitment to act. 2) Awareness that people are poor primarily because of government policies or lack thereof, and that we can act to make a difference. 3) Walking the path of “righteousness” – correcting the injustices of our communities, country and world – with others; people of other Christian communities; people of other religious expressions; and people with no “identifiable” religious expression, but who are committed to the principles and values of peace, justice and the total care of creation. Together we can and do make a difference. 4) Viewing the world from the spectacles of the “poor” and examining government policies and our own church policies.

Bishop McDonald reminded the participants of how we have been shaped and formed by the spiritual values of the current economy. As a result we need not just political analysis, but a spiritual analysis of the economy along with a new spiritual formation and revolution.

BOOK-END #2 –READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

On the evening following the all-day forum, participants again were encouraged in deep listening and engaging in what they heard during the day. They were encouraged to see where there was hope or energy and how they could answer the question about how they were being invited to participate in God's action in the midst of the global economic crisis.

To begin the reflection, **Bill Ryan** spoke briefly. He referred to Nicholas Stern who says that we are in the worst crisis in history, where we have the power to destroy the earth. Ryan suggested that the Achilles heel of the current system is greed, self interest and individualism which kill solidarity and community. What is needed is a new mindset, and way of being, as well as institutions that can carry these new ideas. Instead of despair we need imagination and hope -- here is where churches can contribute. But hope without a plan is just a dream. We need shared experiences which allow us to mobilize on an adequate scale. And it is not just about policy statements. Churches need to contribute to deep spiritual formation, including spiritual formation of politicians.

After further small group discussions, the participants reflected on their experiences of the last two days. They spoke about this being a Kairos moment – a moment of clear challenge. But where do we go next? A history lesson on what we have already done would be useful, as well as some means of passing on the broad common experience of this forum. A significant theme was that of integrating spiritual disciplines into social action and advocacy – a deep counter-cultural spiritual analysis of our times. The participants had a sense of being called to respond to the crises and to engage with politicians. The question was how to engage congregations in their spiritual formation, their ability to speak to issues and how to live as alternative communities.

There was energy and spiritual excitement to integrate analysis, action and theological reflection. This was a moment which could take root and unite participants in a new boldness to use the power of faith to speak to the gospel in public life because the world needs it.