Connectin g wit h th e Worl d Church | Februar y 2010

WHAT PRICE THE EARTH?

Scottish faith leaders on the march Photo: Ian MacNicol

At Copenhagen in December 2009 the world's leaders "noted" scientific warnings about climate change but were unable to agree on action.

I believe this is because the depth of the problem transcends what politics, economics and technology alone can handle. We also need the world's great faiths to develop spiritualities that can read the signs of the times and deepen motivation for action.

We might start with the ground beneath our feet - with this evolving Earth as part of 'the Creation'. Here God's immanent presence illuminates, sustains and quickens all of life (Gen. 1:3; John 1:3; Heb. 1:3).

Those of us with Scots Presbyterian backgrounds were taught that "God exeeuteth His decrees in the works of CREATION and PROVIDENCE." Such language may date back to 1647, but the point remains valid. Collectively we have abused the Grace-given 'provide-ence' of Providence. Too often we have canonised greed. But now the planet's life support systems are weakening.

That is why we see some of the world's greatest scientific minds and institutions issuing bitter lamentations and statements of deep concern. The less we act to cut carbon emissions today, the more we risk waves of a slow apocalypse tomorrow. But 'apocalypse' not only means the consequences of flood, fire and drought. It also means revelation.

Our revelatory calling is perennial: to "stand at the crossroads, and

look, and ask... where the good way lies; and walk in it" (Jer. 6:16).

Our mission must be to tackle the consumerism at the cutting edge of what drives climate change; consumerism as consumption in excess of what's needed for dignified sufficiency in life.

Too many of us for too long have aped the mores of the rich. But the Earth can no longer afford the rich. "I brought you into a plentiful land ... but you made my heritage an abomination" (Jer. 2:7).

The 'greening' of churches is one facet of such witness. But spiritually that's the small task. Our greater task is harder. It is to reveal consumerism as idolatry to show why that matters, and to explore alternatives. Because "they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). And so, "the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants" (Isa. 24:4).

I have used a scriptural exegesis here because this is a Christian publication. But I find that out in the world you have to start by confessing your own complicity. Then you can move to exploring the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, love, community and other ways of transcending the 'Babylonian' blandishments of consumerism. That's where I find hope.

Alastair Mclntosh, author of Hell and High Water: Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition

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