

Storm of hope

ChristianEcologyLink

2010

Choose life with
Christian Ecology Link

► Deciding to live

The markets have been snatched from the brink of catastrophe. There will be a little pain from spending cuts and some judicious regulation. Before long, we are assured, we'll be back on the road to economic growth.

So that's OK, then? Actually, no. We may believe we had only the credit crunch to overcome, but in fact the world is facing a looming 'triple crunch': credit-fuelled financial meltdown, accelerating climate change and peaking supply of oil.

Our current model of globalisation is facing the judgment of ecological reality and gaping inequality. Time is short for building an alternative, but we already have an idea of what it would look like. Jesus had a name for the truly sustainable economy: he called it the kingdom of God.

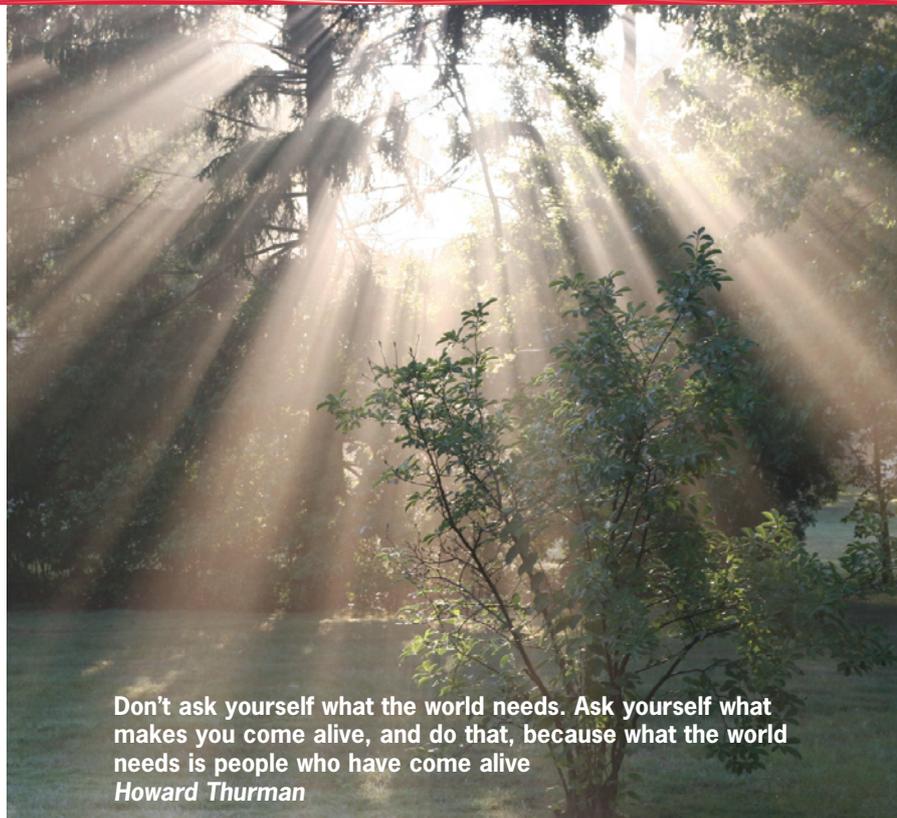
But just as the kingdom is in our midst, so is resistance to it. We don't change, because we do not want to, or do not know how to. Even if we know the effect the toxic system is having on creation, including ourselves and our children, we are inextricably part of it. Who will rescue us from this body of death, asks St Paul? His answer provides Christians with an urgent new mandate: to proclaim the gospel in our economic life.

In this issue of *Storm of Hope* we explore the kind of economy the world needs. Not more growth, more debt, more consumption, but transformative faith, hope and love. It is a revolution of the soul, as well as economics. Christian Ecology Link (CEL) has been praying for it for years. Now we get to work.

► **If fossil fuels continue to be burned at their current rate, global average temperatures could have risen by 4°C by 2050 – well into the range that risks runaway climate change**

► **Oil prices are becoming increasingly volatile as reserves decline. Some scientists think demand is already outstripping the discovery of new supplies**

► **Last year the government gave £1 trillion of UK taxpayers' money to banks to stave off financial meltdown, a thousand times what it invested in renewable energy**



Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive
Howard Thurman

► A bias to the Earth

For decades the churches have urged a bias to the poor. But without the Earth there is no economy, either for rich or poor. Christian economic witness must also proclaim a bias to the Earth. It will prepare the way for an economy which is just not only to present generations, but to the future, and to other species which God has charged us to keep.

A sustainable economy is not just good news for them – it is also good news for us in the world's richest 20 per cent. Righteous economics will enable us to regain our true stature as creatures of God, to reconnect with the soil from which Adam first was made, to rediscover ourselves as made in God's image and likeness.

Getting there will be a long and difficult journey. It will be controversial and require perseverance. We will be asked to surrender some of the things we cherish, because its aim is love for the common good rather than self. But it will be no less than a journey into the truth.

Join us on that journey. CEL is for all those who want to be more, rather than have more. We do not yet know exactly what such an economy will look like, or how to get there, but we know it is possible.

Let's not be afraid to admit we were wrong. Let's ask the questions, and seek out the solutions. Setting out and leaving behind misguided certainties will take courage, but that courage will be ours when we make a simple decision – we decide to live.

Kingdom economics – an explorer’s guide

Jesus offers us the gift of life in all its fulness. This requires an economy which meets our needs, and helps us to meet the needs of others in the human and non-human creation: to ‘till the garden and care for it’. If another world is going to be possible ordinary people will have to make economics their business. After all, it is too important a subject to be left to the economists!



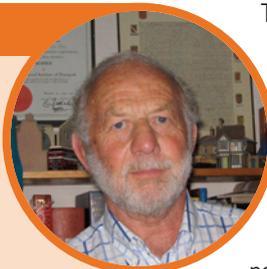
Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all you need will be given to you as well

To start with, it would help to measure what really matters, so that decisions are geared to promoting happiness rather than screwing more economic output from an already stressed planet. Currently the most powerful measure driving economic policy is growth in Gross Domestic Product. GDP simply measures economic activity, whether beneficial or harmful. It even includes the environmental and social repairs which are necessary because of the damage our economy causes. A far better measure would be well-being.

That’s what the **Happy Planet Index** is designed to measure. Developed by the New Economics Foundation, the Index regards well-being as an ultimate goal of human endeavour. It shows that people can live long, happy lives without using more than their fair share of the Earth’s resources. Happiness really does not have to cost the Earth. The new international ranking of environmental impact and well-being reveals a very different picture of the wealth, and poverty, of nations from the one you might expect.

Jerry says ...

The exciting thing about the Transition movement is that it offers attainable sustainability from which even the most pessimistic and negative individual can find hope and inspiration. CEL’s ‘Churches in Transition’ initiative offers support for Christians who want to join in. The church must get involved!



A report by Prof Tim Jackson, Economics Commissioner of the Sustainable Development Commission, shows that there are better ways of delivering well-being for all whilst also protecting the planet. **Prosperity without Growth?** sets out a twelve-step programme for an economy which is both ecologically and economically stable – see the box below.

Twelve steps to a sustainable economy

In *Prosperity without Growth* the Sustainable Development Commission proposes how governments could effect the transition to a sustainable economy. Christians will recognise many of them as fulfilling the teaching of Jesus.

Building a sustainable macro-economy

1. Developing macro-economic capability not based on debt
2. Investing in public assets and infrastructures
3. Increasing financial and fiscal prudence
4. Reforming macro-economic accounting

Protecting capabilities for flourishing

5. Sharing the available work and improving the work-life balance
6. Tackling systemic inequality
7. Measuring capabilities and flourishing
8. Strengthening human and social capital
9. Reversing the culture of consumerism

Respecting ecological limits

10. Imposing clearly defined resource/emissions caps
11. Implementing fiscal reform for sustainability
12. Promoting technology transfer and international ecosystem protection.

Negotiating the transition to a stable, sustainable economy requires decisive action, willpower and public support, as well as some specific policies to undo the damage that has been done. To tackle that ‘triple crunch’ of debt, climate change and peak oil, a group of economists have proposed **The Green New Deal**. Taking its title from Roosevelt’s US New Deal in the 1930s when a huge programme of investment followed the financial crisis of 1929, ‘The Green New Deal’ considers that we are faced with a call to action which is even more urgent.

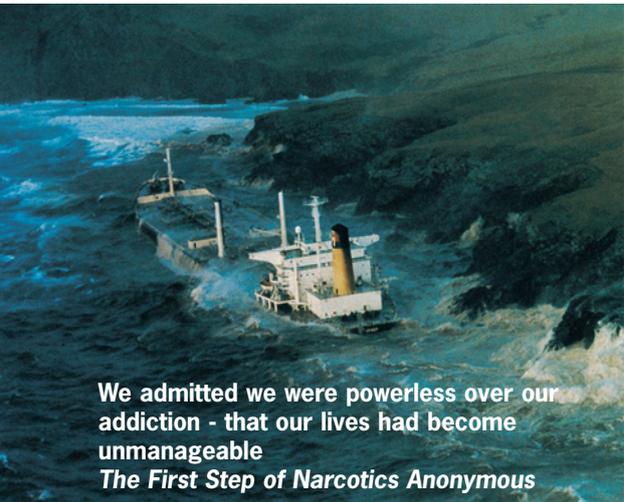
The authors propose a structural transformation of the regulation of national and international financial systems, and major changes to taxation systems. Because there is no economy without ecology, they also argue for a sustained programme to invest in and deploy energy conservation and renewable energies, coupled with effective demand management.

This is only a selection of the fresh ideas around, which are consistent with Jesus’ teaching on the reign of God. There is much more that our churches can do to commend them to governments and the wider world. But there is much to do individually if we are to speak out with sincerity – to mirror the Sustainable Development Commission’s report we also need a twelve-step programme for the soul.

Transition spirituality

The key to change is deep in the human spirit. It is here that the motives which drive our choices dwell. What goes on there determines whether we are captive or free. We are ultimately accountable, to each other, to creation and to God, for whether we find that freedom – and we can only find it by reaching out to a power beyond our own.

All over the world the Twelve-Step Programme has empowered people held captive by addiction to find freedom by reaching out – see the box, right.



We admitted we were powerless over our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable
The First Step of Narcotics Anonymous

Living for a future

As anyone who has been helped by Alcoholics Anonymous will tell you, none of the twelve steps is easy – but Jesus did not promise that his way would be easy. Is it possible that our churches could become places where this kind of work is done?

That is what CEL believes, and we want to help you make it happen. We want to see congregations and church leaders nurturing the imagination so that a future seems possible once more. We see home groups, cell groups, study groups and prayer groups helping each other and their neighbours along the rocky road to true sustainability, with determination, celebration and friendship.

We have called the project **ecocell**. In 2008 we produced materials on CD which were well received. Now we are developing an ambitious new programme which will set demanding aims based on sound science, including reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by 80 or 90 percent over the next few years.

Impossible, you might think. That is precisely why the next stage of the project will encourage people in action at the community, institutional and political levels, and in prayer. It will be a journey not in guilt but in resolute love.

Reaching sustainable levels of consumption might take years, and even after that it will not be easy to maintain. For some of us the task will extend beyond our own lifetime. Wherever we are in life, we can only reach the destination if we travel together. If you would like to be part of this journey, join us.

Twelve steps for work in the soul

Alcoholics Anonymous and related organisations have helped millions of people worldwide recover from addiction. The programme offers an experience of healing which our materialistic society badly needs, following twelve steps to recovery:

- 1: We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2: We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 3: We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
- 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- 5: We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- 6: We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- 7: We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- 8: We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- 9: We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- 10: We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- 11: We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Narcotics Anonymous



Helen says

*Ten year old Helen has some understanding of the place of her generation in history. She said to her mother Ruth the other day "You're so lucky, Mummy, you are probably living in the best time ever – you haven't lived through a war and climate change hasn't happened yet for you. But it will for me." Is this not just the **Age of Stupid**, but also the **Age of Ingratitude**?*

Witnesses to history

No previous generation has borne the responsibility which confronts our own. It is not melodramatic to say so – that is what the science means for us. More and more people are finding that the evidence questions not only what they do in the world, but what they are for the world. For many CEL members this challenge is the cost of being a disciple today. Here Ruth Jarman describes the faith which keeps her hope alive.

'My eldest daughter and I went to Copenhagen for the middle weekend of the conference. Despite the 36 hours in trains and stations, we were invigorated by spending so much time, and in such close quarters, with other people who know how bad things are, believe there is still hope for the earth, and cannot but act on that hope. Helen turned 10 on the train somewhere in Denmark and I brought out a vegan chocolate cake with candles while the French, British and Danish people who were still awake in our carriage joined in with "Happy Birthday".

'With 100,000 people we marched to the conference centre on the Saturday. We didn't know and we couldn't control what was

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Join us

Since 1982 CEL has been working with Christians, churches and the green movement to witness to hope in the ecological crisis.

You can become a member for £18 a year, or £10 if you are on a low income (less with a standing order). Send your details to our Information Officer using the form below.

To find out more before committing yourself, visit our extensive website: www.christian-ecology.org.uk, sign up for our free monthly news e-mail at www.christian-ecology.org.uk/membersandfriends or contact us for a free introductory pack.

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happening in the minds or documents of the conference delegates, all we could do was to be there, to tell them with our presence that the earth needs them to agree a deal that is safe and fair. At the end of the march four of us stopped and prayed for courage, compassion and wisdom for the negotiators, and for the Holy Spirit to turn upside down the priorities of politics.

'Mozart once said "I pay no attention whatever to anybody's praise or blame. I simply follow my own feelings." The failure of Copenhagen at this time when there is no time does not change how we know we must live – if anything it should spur us on to live with radical simplicity, not because it will save the world, but because, if we really listen to our feelings, it is the only way to function in this world, at this time, with morality and wisdom.'



CEL gatherings in 2010 12-14 February, Scarborough

'On the verge of chaos: Transitional living in a time of collapse' Following our 2009 Annual Conference on Transition Towns in Devon, we hear from Rev Sam Norton and CEL members, and learn how to get involved in Transition Towns ourselves.

15-17 October, Suffolk

Another return visit to Ringsfield Hall Christian Eco-Study Centre for a weekend of worship and fellowship, with time out in the surrounding countryside. This year's focus will be on biodiversity.

Saturday 6 November, London

CEL's Annual Members' Meeting and workshop, close to Euston Station. An opportunity to contribute to the work of CEL, and gain inspiration for your own.

CEL brings together some 900 people in the UK and beyond who are praying and working for that 'transition journey'. We offer:

Gatherings: Each year we hold at least two conferences, retreats or workshops to enable members to meet

Local groups: Fifteen groups are directly affiliated to CEL, and we are pleased to offer support, advice and materials to others

Prayer: Each month we publish a daily Prayer Guide available by e-mail, on our website, or by post

Campaigns: Our Churches in Transition initiative offers support to Christians in transition town groups. Our LOAF campaign promotes food which is Locally Grown, Organically produced, Animal friendly and Fairly traded. We also support the climate change campaign Operation Noah, which we established in 2001

Green Christian magazine: Published twice a year, *Green Christian* is packed with news, thought-provoking articles, reviews and resources

Exhibition materials: We can provide a range of leaflets, banners and posters for events and displays giving a Christian perspective on environmental topics

CELINK and CELNET: Members can join a discussion forum and social network to exchange news and advice

E-news: We publish regular e-mails for members and non-members on events and resources from CEL and other Christian environmental organisations

Website: You can find further details of all the above at www.christian-ecology.org.uk or contact our Information Officer at the address above.