

# Vocation for Justice



## Editorial

Spring 2011 Volume 25 No 1

### It's Not Fair

At this stage we must be almost saturated with talk, discussion and commentary on the economy. It is impossible to open a newspaper or turn on the television without being bombarded by analysis of the economy and the recession. (If you think it is bad here you should pay a visit to Ireland where the whole national debate is reduced to 24/7 discussion on pounds, shillings and pence!) I'm not too surprised by this as the UK, and indeed most of Europe, is in a sorry state. Neither am I inclined or capable of adding anything new to the analysis.

However, from all the debate, I would like to pick out the word *fairness* and offer a reflection on it. *Fairness* has a very direct connotation. It's a word often used by children – "*that's just not fair*" is a phrase that you often hear. They tend to know instinctively what is fair or unfair. We now tend to replace the word *justice* for *fairness*.

A very wise person once gave me an example of how to measure the quality of an institution, such as a hospital. You send a team of experts to the hospital. They consult the managers of the hospital and they will be given statistics on how well the hospital is run and organised. They consult the doctors and

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they will be told about the quality of the medical care. Yet, the most important group to consult are the patients

in the hospital, as they are the people who will give you the truth about the hospital, the quality of care, the respect with which they are listened to and treated. They will tell you about the fairness of the place.

The same is true for a country. It is by consulting the victims, those who are suffering or poor, that we will find out the real state of our country.

And it seems to me that we are becoming a more unfair society, not just in the UK but also globally. This is very vividly portrayed in the issue of bankers' bonuses. This is causing a lot of justified anger and frustration. People perceive that it is just not fair that this happens in a society where so many are struggling to make ends meet and we are told to expect further austerity measures.

It's not fair that we spend so much on war and the arms industry in a world where so many people are dying of hunger and treatable diseases. It's not fair that people are exploited and abused in the workplace. It's not fair

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Columban Father Sean Martin celebrates mass at a picket line in Midsalip, the Philippines. Columban missionaries are supporting local people in their non-violent action - including sitting on drilling equipment - to prevent mining companies from exploration drilling for minerals in a vital Mindanao rainforest. > See page 3.

## COLUMBAN MISSION

Collaborating with the National Justice and Peace Network of England and Wales & Justice and Peace Scotland

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that so many people are denied access to proper medical attention. It's not fair that our planet is gradually dying because of greed and overexploitation. It's not fair that poor communities, who are most affected by these problems, are the least responsible for them. It's not fair that the planned austerity measures in the UK will broaden the gap between the rich and the poor. It's not fair that our young people are finding it more difficult than ever to access third level education. In this issue, we ponder the question of whether the 'Big Society' proposed by this government is a fair Society or not.

As Christians, we have been invited to follow Jesus who came to "*bring Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight and to set the downtrodden free*" (Luke 4, 18). This also brings a responsibility to work for the defence of the poor and the exploited earth. We have a vocation for justice. Let us commit ourselves ever more firmly to that task.

The next issue of **Vocation for Justice** will mark its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The issue will be larger than usual, and even here you will notice an upgrade in production. We will also be organising a special event in London on Friday evening 13 May. Speakers will address our three key areas of focus - Justice, Peace and the Environment. The special publication and event will celebrate achievements of the Justice and Peace movement over the past 25 years, underline the Church's Social Teaching as being central to the mission of the Church, and look at themes and strategies for the future.

Readers are invited to apply for an invitation to attend the event and celebrate with us. We thank you for all your support over the years. Thank you especially to all who generously



**Peter Hughes SSC**

contributed to the request for funds that went out with the last issue. Your donations help us to continue serving the interests of justice and fairness in the UK and around the world.

## 'Big Society' and 'Kingdom of God'

*Philip Young*

**Norwich vicar Rev Phillip Young is glad that politicians are talking about Prime Minister David Cameron's 'Big Society', but he examines the relationship between this and the 'Kingdom of God'.**

I'm very glad that politicians are talking about the 'Big Society'. A low point in political thinking came when Maggie Thatcher declared that there was no such thing as society. There seemed to follow a period when looking after number one took centre stage and the selfish pursuit of wealth seemed to dominate.

Selfishness is still with us, as the bankers' bonuses highlight very clearly, but there seems to be an opportunity for society to change, as we are all challenged to think about the 'Big Society'. What worries me is that this is just a political game, and that, in the short term, nothing much will change. If society remains good for the few who are able to afford it and bad for those in poverty, then we will not be building the 'Big Society', but just maintaining the unequal society. A society should not be based on the charity of the rich helping to relieve the worst effects of poverty, but on redistributing wealth on a much more radical scale.

The 'Big Society' that David Cameron is promoting is about giving more power to local communities and local organisations, so that they can provide some of the services that have previously been provided by the state. This sounds very good in theory, but I think the shift is happening too fast. Services are being cut, which are inevitably affecting the disabled, poor and vulnerable more than those who have their own wealth to protect them. The new provisions will take time to emerge and I wonder whether all the needs can be met by new social enterprises.

We must monitor the needs of the vulnerable and hold the government to account if people are left without the support they need. After cutting too much, too quickly, the government may have to re-think and re-introduce some state or local government provision. It is the needs of the vulnerable which should drive the provision, and the last thing we need now is cuts in essential services. Let caring for one another be the dominant theme that drives the move to a 'Big Society'.

So what is the relationship between the 'Big Society' and the 'Kingdom of God'? The Church's purpose, right from its foundation with the coming of Jesus, is to bring about the Kingdom of God. The prayer that Jesus taught us has, at its heart, '*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*'. So the Kingdom of God, that the Church is interested in bringing about, will have certain characteristics that can help us to answer what kind of 'Big Society' it is that we wish to work towards.

Firstly, it is a society based on love. God is love and wants us to be loving. So I personally think that any 'Big Society' which is not based on loving and caring for each other, is not worth working for. Love is inclusive, and if there is one single person in our society who is excluded and unloved, then this is a challenge to all of us.

Secondly, it is a society where leadership is based on serving one another. Jesus shows us that to be a leader is to serve others. He gave us the example of washing the disciples' feet and said that the greatest amongst us is the least. So the 'Big Society' needs leaders who are willing to love and to serve. We don't want politicians or rich people to be selfish and greedy, and to lord it over others, but to be loving, gentle and kind.

Thirdly, the 'Big Society' needs to be an equal society. The prayer of Mary, mother of Jesus, is a very radical prayer - "*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly*". Whenever the kingdom of heaven comes then there is the breaking into the world of peace and justice. We cannot have peace without justice, and the coming of the kingdom of heaven is sometimes very disturbing, because injustice needs to be challenged and overturned. The 'Big Society' needs to be based on justice for it will never be a Good Society if it is rife with inequality.

For the 'Big Society' to work it must be Good Society, and the only Good Society is that which is based on the principles of the Kingdom of God. ■

See blog at website [www.stthomasheigham.org](http://www.stthomasheigham.org)

# Columban Mission

## Holding Back the Floodgates

Frank Nally

**Columban Frank Nally worked in Mindanao, Philippines, for eight years. In the UK he is a founder member of the UK-based Working Group on Mining in the Philippines.**



In December 2010, heavy rains, flooding and landslides hit the Philippines as the ocean-atmosphere phenomenon of La Niña threatened

lives and property. The floodgates of mother nature are often opened as a consequence of human ignorance in extracting resources at unsustainable levels. We destroy precious ecosystems to feed our ever growing consumption, especially of Information Technology gadgets that require rare earths and metals. But what are the real costs, and who carries the greatest burden?

In the Philippines, as elsewhere, it is indigenous peoples, farmers and fisher folk, together with faith communities, that realise the intimate connection between the destruction of their environment and the floods, erosion and landslides that follow. In the Midsalip area of Mindanao, the wisdom of indigenous people is their knowledge that if they protect the forest, biodiversity and watersheds, use organic and contour farming methods, and live in harmony with mother earth they experience her generosity in the care shown her. When they have not cared they have suffered. They have learned by experience.

The battle over mining in Midsalip, and in the global south generally, is between local wisdom and imported, imposed development that destroys bioregionalism. Bioregionalism understands and respects local ecosystems and the human interconnection with other living organisms. We often deny our dependence on mother earth and ignore the consequences of our actions on the natural world. Our domination over nature has removed all our fears and superstitions. We are anaesthetised to the cry of the earth and her people.

*Arangkada Philippines 2010 - A Business Perspective* was published by the Joint Foreign Chambers (JFC) in the Philippines in December 2010. It wants no floodgates or real protection for the environment. While it acknowledges the dire state of the Philippine environment, it still wants more liberalised mining.

The updated Mining Tenement Maps on the Mines and Geosciences Bureau website show the potential destruction in the scope of the business plan. The map for the Zamboanga Peninsula – including Midsalip where the Columbans work - is frightening. For all Mining Tenement Maps see <http://www.mgb.gov.ph/lmtp.aspx> The Geohazard maps are also available at <http://www.mgb.gov.ph/lhmp.aspx>. They demonstrate that much of the Philippines is already prone to hazards such as flooding.

Another issue is the JFC advising Central Government to make changes in the Local Government Code to prevent local government blocking mining regionally. Some provinces have blocked open-pit mining by implementing Environmental Codes, as in the case in South Cotabato where Bishop Dinualdo Gutierrez has been influential. The Local Government Code gives citizens the right to seek redress from decisions of national and local government and the courts. This Code must not be touched to please international interests, for it is a tool for holding politicians accountable.

It is worthwhile revisiting the recommendations in the Working Group on Mining in the Philippines Report **Philippines- Mining or Food?** <http://www.piplinks.org/system/files/mining+or+Food+Recommendations.pdf> Mining needs to be demoted as a national priority and placed at least on a par alongside other vital industries. Agriculture and Fisheries should be given priority status. Environmental protection needs urgent attention and decisive action. The Working Group has written to the Bishops' Conference of the Philippines to offer solidarity for their work during 2011, continuing their various calls to cherish and protect the natural world. ■

## Columban missionaries in court

In early January Columban missionaries in the Philippines - Fr Sean Martin and Sr Patty Dinare - were ordered to attend the Regional Trial Court in the town of Aurora, Mindanao. They have been supporting local groups in the Parish of San Jose, Midsalip, who joined the Subaanen Indigenous people in a picket to block a mining company from drilling in their ancestral rainforest. Fr Sean and Sr Patty were called upon to answer charges at a pre-trial hearing that they acted illegally. There are also two criminal cases pending in the Regional Trial Court of Pagadian City against the local people of Midsalip, including Fr Sean and Sr Patty.

The people - supported by Columban missionaries - are challenging the alleged abuse of power by some local government officials and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Mines and Geosciences Bureau for giving permits and licenses to mining corporations.

The mining corporations, as represented by the Joint Foreign Chambers of commerce, and affluent Filipino elites are pressurising newly elected President Nonoy Aquino and his officials to give in to their demands to open up the lands, forest and mountains to their destructive plans in the name of economic development and poverty eradication.

**Please sign and post the campaigning postcard included with this newsletter. Updates on [www.columbans.co.uk](http://www.columbans.co.uk)**

### MINING AWARD

The Working Group on Mining in the Philippines - in which Columban Justice and Peace plays a leading role - has received the 2011 Armin Rios-Marin Award. It is named after an environmentalist who was murdered in 2007 while leading a protest against tree removal to access nickel on Sibuyan Island. He was shot in the mouth at point blank range by a security official of the mining company Sibuyan Nickel Properties Development Corporation, which had an agreement to sell the ore to BHP Billiton. Marin had been an official of the World Wildlife Fund Philippines and was the 23rd environmentalist to be murdered during the Macapagal-Arroyo administration which ended in June 2010. **Enquiries to [wgmppuk@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:wgmppuk@tiscali.co.uk)**

## Severe Weather Warming

Sean McDonagh

**Unseasonable cold weather in December 2010 does not mean that climate change is not happening, points out a Columban ecologist who attended December's UN Climate Summit in Mexico.**

In the midst of the cold spell in Ireland and Britain in December 2010, a letter in *The Irish Times* said "Global warming – more like global freeze! On your bike, Greens!" But have the exceptionally cold winters of 2009 and 2010 proved conclusively that climate change is not happening? They have not.

Recently, the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany pointed out that the overall warming of the planet could in fact lead to colder winters in the Northern Hemisphere. They argued that the disappearance of sea ice in the eastern Arctic in summer, is having a major effect on the weather patterns in the Northern hemisphere. When sea ice remains in the Arctic ocean in the summer the white surface reflects the sun's light and energy back into space. This is known as the *albedo effect*. When the ice melts, the blue water absorbs the sun's energy and the *albedo effect* plummets. This then leads to what is called a 'negative feedback loop'. As more sea ice is lost to the oceans more energy is absorbed by them which, in turn, heats up the planet. As the Arctic Ocean warms it heats up the lower levels of the atmosphere. This, in turn, leads to serious anomalies in the atmospheric airstreams, which trigger an overall cooling of the northern hemisphere.

The Potsdam Institute's study was published in the *Journal of Geophysical Research*. According to Valdimir Petoukhov, the main author of the study: "These anomalies could triple the probability of cold winter extremes in Europe and Northern Asia. The recent severe winters do not conflict with the global warming picture, but rather supplement it". Dr Kieran Hickey of the National University of Ireland in Galway supports the Potsdam analysis. "Climatically, we're moving into unknown territory" he says; "when the climate is changing rapidly, you get lots of extremes – look at the flooding and freezing events of the past two years". He adds that, "the climate is clearly out of equilibrium".

Across the globe, in the state of Assam in India, climate change is wreaking havoc on the tea growing industry. Climate change is evident in the steady rise in temperature and the erratic rainfall patterns. Growers claim that

climate change has caused two major changes in tea production. The first is a drop in production. The second is a change in the taste of the tea, and this may have a greater impact on the industry's survival than the drop in production. L. P. Chaliha, who is a professional tea taster, complains that, "earlier, we used to get a bright strong cup of tea, but now, it is not so". Debakanta Handique, a climate scientist in Assam, is convinced that the above changes are due to climate change. If the unique flavour of Assam's tea is lost, then the industry could collapse with enormous consequences for many people. 55% of India's tea is produced in Assam and this accounts for around 31% of the global production. But production has been slipping in recent years. In 2007, Assam produced 564,000 tons of tea. This had slipped to 487,000 in 2009 and the projection for 2010 is that it will have slipped further down to 460,000 tons. The tea industry in India employs about three million people, so any further deterioration in the situation will have major negative consequences for many people.

Climate change has most probably intensified the monsoon rains that triggered record floods during January in Queensland, Australia, according to Matthew England of the Climate Change Research Centre at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. He is not excluding other factors, such as the impact of La Niña, on weather patterns in Asia, South America and Australia. He is saying that, "the waters of Australia are the warmest ever measured and those waters provided moisture to the atmosphere for the Queensland and northern Australian monsoon". At least 25 people were killed and many others reported missing as flood waters tore through the city of Brisbane. The mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman, said 11,900 homes and 2,500 businesses had been completely inundated, with another 14,700 houses and 2,500 businesses at least partially covered in water. The Australian premier Anna Bligh reflected that, "Queensland is reeling from the worst natural disaster in our history and possibly in the history of our nation". She went on to say that, "we've seen three-quarters of our state experience the devastation of raging

flood waters and we now face a reconstruction task of post-war proportions".

Kevin Trenberth, head of the Climate Analysis Section at the National Centre for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, US, feels that the intense La Niña and climate change were responsible for many of the extreme events in the past year. He points to the high ocean temperature in the Indian Ocean last year and the rapid onset of La Niña after the El Niño ended in May 2010. In his view, "the rapid onset of La Niña meant the Asian monsoon was enhanced and the over 1 degree celsius anomalies in sea surface temperature led to the flooding in India and China in July 2010 and Pakistan in August 2010". He went on: "A portion - about 0.5 degree celsius of the ocean temperature around northern Australia - which is more than 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-1970 levels - could be attributed to global warming. The extra water vapour fuels the monsoon and thus alters the winds and the monsoon itself and so this increases the rainfall further."

Some scientists, such as Neville Nicholls of Monash University in Melbourne, are more cautious. He feels, "it is a natural phenomenon and we have no strong reason at the moment for saying this La Niña is any stronger than it would be without humans". However, even he adds that "global atmospheric temperature increase has to be having some impact; it has to be affecting the climate, regionally and globally". ■

### FLOOD HELP IN PAKISTAN

Columbans in Pakistan are involved in long-term assistance to victims of last year's devastating floods. Funds donated to the Columbans have been used to distribute food and offer practical support through the Catholic parish in Larkana, 260 miles north of Hyderabad. Also, St. Elizabeth Hospital in Hyderabad has set up an extended Mobile Medical Outreach team staffed by Christian and Muslim doctors, nurses and midwives. Free medical care has been given to around 10,000 patients. Prevalent sicknesses are malaria, skin diseases, eye infections, malnutrition, gastroenteritis, and high blood pressure caused by stress. Bottled water and nutritional supplements have been distributed.

**Updates: [www.columbans.co.uk](http://www.columbans.co.uk)**

## Are we all in this together?

Ellen Teague

“We’re all in this together”, goes the chirpy chorus of a *High School Musical* song. But our Prime Minister David Cameron is leading the chorus these days, applying it to his favourite term – the ‘Big Society’. Yet as 2011 gets underway, with massive changes in public and community services, I wonder if we are all in this together?

Almost daily, I hear of the impact of public spending cuts on family and friends: a health worker with 22 years experience in the NHS in Central London has been notified that her job could go after ‘restructuring’; friends have been made redundant from charities after the Department for International Development reduced funding. And as I top up the loans of my two children at university so that they can pay for accommodation and eat, I can’t help thinking we are moving backwards from my own university days. In the 1970s I received a grant sufficient to pay all my costs without debt and to persuade my father – who took his first job at 14 – that I could choose further education over employment at 18.

In early January a leading charity figure warned David Cameron that organisations like his, which should be the “bedrock of the Big Society”, were “wobbling”. The pace of cuts could “kill off” the groups needed to build the ‘Big Society’, said Community Links co-founder David Robinson, whose East London-based charity provides welfare services, such as housing and debt advice, employment support and youth clubs. He reflected that removing legal aid funding for advice on welfare benefits would wipe out agencies addressing these problems and, “there is next to no chance of local councils picking up the tab when most are stopping funding, not increasing it”. He felt many disadvantaged people – particularly the elderly – would simply struggle on until they reach crisis point such as illness or eviction.

So, what are the churches saying? Positive comments about the ‘Big Society’ have been made by both Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster and Archbishop Peter Smith of Southwark and indeed the Bishops’ own Caritas Social Action Network, but others are more wary. Indeed they warn that church groups should not allow themselves to be used to paper over widening cracks in public service provision.

Simon Barrow of the Christian think tank Ekklesia feels Churches should approach the issue with theological and moral wisdom based on priority concern for social justice and the needs of the most vulnerable. I agree with his view that, “in reality, a ‘big society’ that remains unjust and unequal is no society at all”. Last July a group of Christians – activists, ministers and theologians – issued a statement calling upon Christians to challenge Government cuts in public spending and welfare provision, and to be cautious of being co-opted into the ‘Big Society’ initiative. The group, ‘Common Wealth’, articulated a radical theological critique of Government policies and the social and economic order they seek to maintain. The ‘Big Society’ they said in a statement, “masks oppressive business as usual, suffocating all dissent with its phoney ‘we’re all in it together’ soundbites”.

One hundred days after the Coalition Government was formed, Church Action on Poverty (CAP) expressed alarm that the planned austerity programme will not only worsen the gap between rich and poor, it is also an injustice, since poor people are paying the cost of a crisis caused by the rich. CAP was particularly critical of harsh statements by the Coalition Government which were labelling people on benefits as ‘cheats’. In fact, only 1% of benefit claims are fraudulent, while £16bn of benefits and tax credits actually goes unclaimed. The Coalition is focusing on saving £1.5bn lost to benefit fraud, while making no mention of pursuing the £40–120bn stolen by wealthy tax cheats. Likewise, rather than taxing those who can best afford it – the bankers who caused this economic crisis – they have raised VAT, a regressive tax which hits the poorest hardest. CAP says that churches must “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute” (*Proverbs 31:8*), demonstrating what a real ‘Big Society’, the Kingdom of God, looks like.

After October’s Comprehensive Spending Review, another ecumenical agency, Housing Justice, warned that the announcements on housing, public spending and welfare, “will have the greatest impact on the poorest in society”. Cuts of £1.8 billion to housing benefit mean that over £600 a year will be lost from some of the country’s poorest households. There is talk of forcing people to leave their homes if

the authorities decide the homes are too large. Communities could be destroyed and poorer people forced into the least desirable areas, creating effective ghettos. There will be an inevitable rise in evictions and homelessness. And what is going to happen to vulnerable refugees and migrants in this new era of austerity? Just before Christmas the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams issued a warning that the ‘Big Society’ had not been properly thought through. He pointed out that provision of mental health services in the countryside, for example, is already struggling to address a huge problem and it should not face cuts.

There are plans to spend £470 million over four years to help community groups build the ‘Big Society’. This is expected to pay for 5,000 new community organisers and a National Citizens’ Service, and includes a £100 million fund to help charities, voluntary groups and social enterprise make the transition. But against the rhetoric about the army of volunteers that can plug gaps resulting from spending reductions, it has been estimated that charities will lose £4.5 billion in the cuts, a continuing decline in giving, and forthcoming increases in VAT.

And are the current savage cuts the only way to address the UK’s economic problems? Our only Green MP Caroline Lucas has suggested an alternative. In her view, “if we increase taxes on the highest incomes, scrap expensive and irrelevant projects like Trident, transfer money from road-building to public transport and get tough on tax avoidance and evasion, we could afford a major public investment programme that would create hundreds of thousands of jobs while transforming the economy to help tackle climate change”. And many feel the Robin Hood Tax – a tiny tax on the financial sector – could be an alternative to the cuts, as well as a contribution to tackling global poverty and climate change.

Like David Cameron, Chancellor George Osborne likes to claim that “we are all in this together”, but 18 of the 23 full-time cabinet members are millionaires, including Osborne. The wealthiest will be unaffected by the new austerity, given their access to sources of wealth from which the majority do not benefit. The ‘Big Society’ and deep cuts in public expenditure have become intimately linked and interdependent. There is a need for faith-based groups to be clear about their vision and values in relation to ‘Big Society’ thinking and act upon them. ■

## The 'Big Society' claims it will:

- **Encourage citizens' involvement and action**

More power and responsibility is expected to go to families, groups, networks, neighbourhoods and locally-based communities. There are plans for more community organisers, neighbourhood groups, volunteers, co-operatives, charities, social enterprises and small businesses – all taking more action at a local level.

- **Recognise that everyone has assets, not just problems**

People have resources which they can contribute to society - time, wisdom, experience, energy, knowledge, skills.

- **Build and strengthen social networks**

Those who belong to neighbourhood, church and other networks tend to feel less isolated, more secure, more powerful and happier.

- **Use local knowledge to get better results**

A range of smaller, locally-based organisations can respond more flexibly and appropriately to diverse local issues than large national or international organisations.

- **Offer ways of transforming the welfare state.**

The 'Big Society' addresses challenges facing the welfare state. For more than 60 years, the current model has rested on the premise that the economy will continue to grow, yielding ever more taxes to pay for more and better public services. Now, continuing economic growth is less certain and, even, less desirable in terms of reducing carbon emissions. Sustainable living will require stronger local communities and systems.

## The Downside

### Social justice, equality and cohesion

Not everyone has the same capacity to help themselves and others. It depends on a range of factors, including education and income, family circumstances and environment, confidence and access to the places where decisions are taken. People with low-paid jobs and big family responsibilities – especially lone parents – tend to be poor in discretionary time as well as in money. Unemployed people may have plenty of free time, but committing time to unpaid local activity would put many at risk of losing benefits that depend on actively seeking full-time employment. Long hours, low wages and lack of control over how time is spent undermine a key premise of the 'Big Society', which is that social and financial gains will come from replacing paid with unpaid labour. Poorer areas have fewer resources, hindering local initiatives.

### Dangers of a shrinking state

The 'Big Society' could mean bidding goodbye to the ideals upon which the welfare state was founded: a government committed to raising taxes to build a secure framework of public goods and services that enable everyone, regardless of background and circumstance, to be protected against the risks of illness and unemployment, to be decently educated and housed, and to have enough money to live on.

### Impact on community and non-governmental organisations

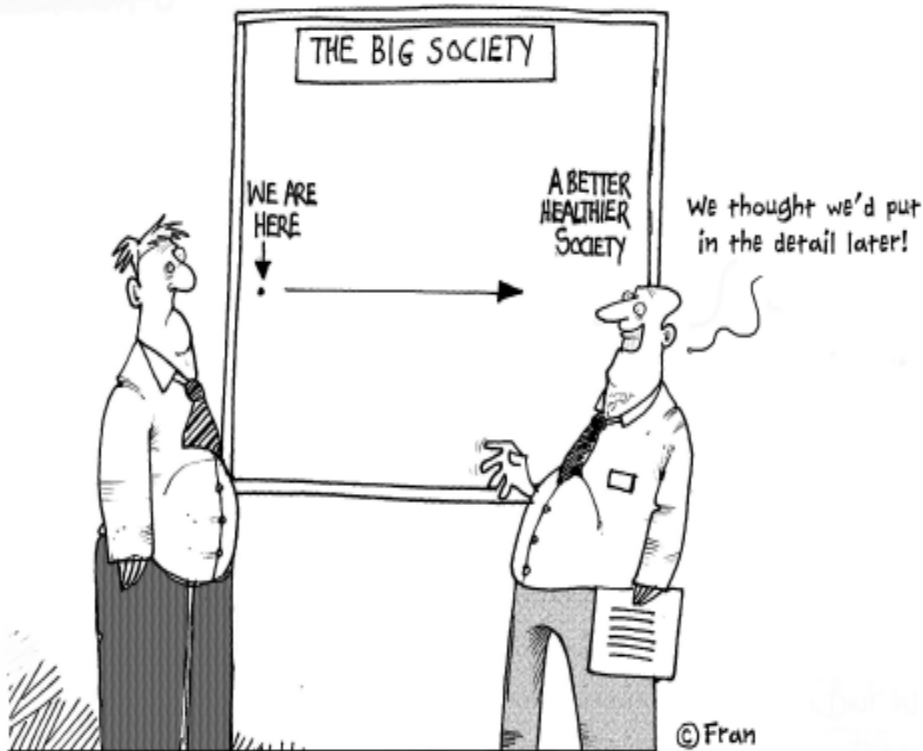
Can community groups, charities and other non-profit organisations cope with the huge chunks of government business that may be handed over to them? The Government is giving some transitional support to the charitable and voluntary sector, but the £470 million over four years, earmarked by the October 2010 Spending Review, will not go very far. The small, locally-based organisations that are supposed to provide the backbone of the 'Big Society' are already having to cope with more acute social needs and having to do so with reduced and less secure funding and support. Most civil society organisations fear that massive spending cuts will undermine the very networks and groups that are needed as life gets tougher for those who are already the most disadvantaged.

### The role of business

As the state retreats and small locally-based organisations face dwindling resources, larger for-profit enterprises with experience in government contracting are likely to move in. The doors are wide open for big global corporations such as United Health, Serco, Capita, and Price Waterhouse Coopers to take over state functions – whether by providing backroom support such as accounting, auditing, IT and management, or by running entire services in health, social care, education, employment, benefits and housing. Paul Pindar, chief executive of Capita, a leading contractor for out-sourced government business, is on record as saying that he is "eagerly anticipating the forthcoming age of austerity" and expects "a greater degree of activity over the next five years than in the previous five". Commercial organisations, whose main responsibility is to shareholders, are bound to put profit ahead of service users' interests.

### Where – and how – does the buck stop?

If power is devolved from the centre to 'communities'; if responsibility is shifted from the state to a range of non-governmental organisations and commercial organisations; then who will be accountable and how for the cumulative effects on people's lives of how government at local and national levels puts the 'Big Society' into practice. And who will be accountable and how for the impact on individuals of the front-line activities of non-state organisations.



## Economic policy and spending cuts

- Welfare cuts of £7 billion announced last October, on top of £11 billion announced in June 2010, will hit families with children particularly hard. Also, legal aid funding for advice on welfare benefits has been removed. SHELTER has predicted that up to 134,000 households could be forced to move or become homeless as a result of the Government's changes in housing allowances. Rents for new tenants in the social housing sector are to be increased to 80% of market rents, effectively ending public housing subsidy. There is a 50% reduction to the **National Affordable Housing Programme**.

- Cuts to local government spending on an unprecedented scale are affecting services, housing and other capital expenditure. There are likely to be fewer libraries, more potholes going unrepaired, parks shutting earlier and youth clubs closing. Less money will be available to cover soaring demand for social care for older people. Grants programmes for voluntary organisations in local authorities are particularly vulnerable to cuts - Croydon Council, for example, has cut 60% of its voluntary sector contracts.

- The **Building Schools for the Future Programme** has been terminated, with a negative impact for pupils, staff and local communities who face restricted activities in antiquated buildings. Reductions to working families' tax credits puts the financing of many childcare services at risks, especially in areas where costs are high. The **Youth Community Action Programme**, which aimed to encourage all 14-19 year-olds to undertake social action has been scrapped. **National Play Programmes**, creating spaces for children to play, have been terminated.

- There will be more people out of work, with up to 500,000 job losses expected in the public sector, and countless more in the private sector as public sector contracts are cut back, for example in construction. Poor areas, which already rely more heavily on public employment, will suffer disproportionately. Women, who make up two-thirds of public sector employees, will take the hardest hit. Rising unemployment will have cumulative effects as people lose homes, pension rights and prospects for improving their lives, as well as earned income. The **Future Jobs Fund** has been cancelled.

## Resources on the 'Big Society'

Common Wealth -  
Christians for Economic and Social Justice

**Statement** on the public spending cuts available at <http://commonwealthnetwork2010.blogspot.com/>

Ekklesia's website - [www.ekklesia.co.uk](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk) - has a number of challenging articles. Do a search on 'Big Society'.

### **Cutting it: The 'Big Society' and the new austerity**

New Economics Foundation  
<http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/cutting-it>

or £10 hard copy and

### **Ten Big Questions about the Big Society**

New Economics Foundation  
Downloadable at

[http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/Ten\\_Big\\_Questions\\_about\\_the\\_Big\\_Society.pdf](http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/Ten_Big_Questions_about_the_Big_Society.pdf)

[http://www.cass.city.ac.uk/cce/resources/thought\\_pieces/BigSocietyCutsandConsequences.pdf](http://www.cass.city.ac.uk/cce/resources/thought_pieces/BigSocietyCutsandConsequences.pdf)

Do a search on 'Big Society' on the Church Action on Poverty website - [www.church-poverty.org.uk](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk)

**Saturday 26 March 2011  
London demonstration in support of public services.**

# Still Small Voice

## Hilary Topp

**Earlier this month the Student Christian Movement (SCM) held its annual conference on the theme, Still Small Voice, including the issue of students' challenge to raising tuition fees. The following is by SCM's National Co-ordinator.**

*"Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech. Proverbs 1:20-21."*

Prophetic or pathetic? The media portrayal of the recent student protests over hikes in tuition fees paints a picture of violence, with protesters being described by David Cameron as "feral thugs". Politicians have been dismissive of students' concerns, blaming 'misinformation' and claiming that students had not actually read the proposals, and there is a widely held belief that students are motivated by self interest, because they don't want to have to pay for the privilege of higher education.

But the government and the media are missing the point. The student protesters are modelling exactly the 'Big Society' that politicians seem so keen on. They do not stand to benefit from their protests – the higher fees won't affect students already in higher education. They are protesting out of a genuine concern for others – for the future generations of would-be students who will be put off higher education when faced with higher fees and the prospect of a lifetime of debt – graduates earning just over £20,000 per year will end up paying off their student loans for most of their working lives. Those who might be in this group include teachers, social workers and many council workers.

The first universities were founded as institutions of religious learning and scholarship and, although only a few people ever made it to university, it was recognised that their learning, and the knowledge they acquired, had a wider public benefit to society. In contrast to this, the government seems concerned only with the economic value of a degree and presents the message that making money is the most important value in society, and the only value in education.

The students, young people and others who have taken to the streets are a prophetic voice. They are challenging the assumption that education is all

about personal economic gain, that higher education must have economic value to have value. They are reminding us that education should be a right, not a privilege for the wealthy few, and that higher education is about the common good – the real 'Big Society'.

The majority have chosen to voice their concerns through peaceful protest, and creative nonviolent civil disobedience, including a 'teach-in' at Euston station in London, sleep-ins at schools and sixth forms, lecture room occupations and sit-ins. Hattie Hodgson, an SCM member and student at the University of Leeds, explains why she joined others in a mass lobby of parliament on the day of the vote:

*"I was there because I felt it was important to let both politicians and the public know that people were not happy about the legislation that was being passed through parliament. I do not feel our efforts were wasted - the media attention the protests have generated have made this the most contentious issue this government has had to fight so far."*

As with all struggles for peace and justice, the risk now is that people will become disillusioned. As a student-led movement SCM is passionate about providing space for student voices, facilitating training in grassroots campaigning and helping people reflect



Hilary Topp

on the radical good news Jesus brought for all. SCM's annual conference *Still Small Voice* was such a chance for students from all over the country to meet together, share experiences, be encouraged and inspired. The theme of prayer and action reflected the on-going struggle for all of us to ground our activism in our faith and spirituality. In the midst of all the political debates around the 'Big Society', make sure you listen for the still, small, prophetic voices. ■

[www.movement.org.uk](http://www.movement.org.uk)

**"Surely it is for the sake of the common good that the state uses taxpayers' money to fund higher education. It is the mechanism whereby the common purse funds what is for the common good."**

*John Saxbee, Anglican Bishop of Lincoln and SCM patron, speaking in the House of Lords 14 December.*

**"The fees vote in parliament is one more nail in the coffin of both the idea and practice of the university as a public good."**

*Exeter University lecturer Dr John Heathershaw, speaking to Ekklesia after dialogue with students involved in a sit-in at the university.*



Sheffield University students join the London demonstrations on 10 November 2010.

Rachel Colley



# 'No' to GM Crops

Pete Riley

**The EU's zero tolerance policy towards GM crops looks set to change in 2011. Columban Justice and Peace is opposed to patenting of life and does not believe GM crops offer a path to food security. It is a member of GM Freeze, whose Campaign Director writes:**

Genetically Modified (GM) crops are on the rise within the EU, and Britain's coalition government has declared that it intends to be the most pro-GM this country has ever seen.

Firstly, it is worth reviewing the current state of play. In the UK, the ban on using GM ingredients in food by supermarkets and manufacturers still holds firm some 12 years after it was first implemented. However this is not true of GM animal feed. We import GM soya and maize to feed poultry and livestock, and the products of this system end up on supermarket shelves and in processed food. Not all meat, eggs and dairy products come from GM-fed animals and birds, but as there is no labelling it is not easy for shoppers to get reliable information.

In this country GM crop research is at a very low level compared to 10 years ago when GM test sites littered the countryside. In 2010 only three small test plots of GM potatoes were grown in England. Wales and Scotland have been free of GM test sites since 2002/03 thanks to the robust anti-GM policies of their respective governments. In Europe the stalemate between Member States and the European Commission (EC) over approvals of GM crops, for import and cultivation, continues. In the Spring of 2010 the EC forced through the first GM crops for growing in Europe since 1998. This was a potato genetically modified to yield just one type of starch, which is used in the manufacture of paper and other products. It is only grown on quota in mainland Europe on a relatively small area. None will be grown in the UK because we don't have a quota.

Approvals of GM crops for import have also been slow because a significant number of Member States want improvements in how the health risk is assessed. There is a gulf between the scientific advisors in some member states and those who advise the EU in the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The same applies to environmental risk assessments, and it remains to be seen whether the proposals from EFSA and the Commission to tighten-up procedures will be approved by member states.

Outside the orbit of Brussels, the GM-free movement in Europe continues to thrive with countries such as Hungary, Austria and Greece opposed to the technology in principle because it does not accord with their view of the direction farming should be heading. The private sector is responding to the anti-GM sentiment in the EU populous (61% oppose GM crops according to the latest EU wide poll) by shifting to non-GM animal feed and selling their products labelled as such. Carrefour, the French supermarket giant, is the latest to announce such an initiative.

2011 may bring a serious attempt by the Commission to get the approval process moving and overcome opposition from member states. The Commission sees GM crops as part of the biotechnological revolution, which they believe will create economic prosperity for the EU – not that GM crops have contributed much so far!

The Commission's plan is to persuade member states to be more open-minded about approving GM crops for cultivation in return for the right to make the final decision on actually growing the crops at national level. The plan has hit problems because the EU and European Parliament lawyers have raised doubts as to the legal grounds on which bans could actually be made. Countries which are pro-GM would be able to sail ahead with planting, and farmers (organic or conventional) could end up with little or no protection from GM contamination. Liability for compensating farmers or beekeepers for GM contamination still remains unresolved across the EU.

Legalising contamination is also on the EC agenda for 2011. First they hope to agree a relaxation allowing a small presence of unauthorised GM crops in imports of animal feed, which is currently illegal. This follows years of pressure from the biotech industry and others, and would be the thin edge of a very big wedge aimed at softening up Europeans to accept GM by means of creeping contamination. Similar plans are afoot to allow a GM threshold in seeds sold to farmers, meaning that crops could be contaminated before they even germinate.

Thus, the pressure is on to force an unwilling European population to accept GM crops by creeping contamination. This process is not inevitable. Neither is the commercialisation of GM crops in the EU and UK. However, it will require a concerted effort by all who feel that GM crops are an unacceptable step up the ladder of intensification in farming at a time when there is a clear and obvious need to move to a more diverse system of farming based on agroecology.

The UK Government will have key votes in the EU Council of Ministers when it makes decisions about GM. The next 12 months will be a crucial period when we need to lobby our MPs and MEPs for a GM-free Europe. ■

Visit [www.gmfreeze.org](http://www.gmfreeze.org). GM Freeze follows issues such as *Cloned Animals*, *the effects of GM organisms on bees* and *supermarket meat fed on GM Soya*. Another key area is how the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID) is putting significant research money towards pro-GM companies and industrial farming methods. See also <http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/gmo.htm>.

## Vatican distances itself from GM Organisms.

WikiLeaks cables referring to the Vatican show that Vatican officials told the US that the Vatican was unlikely to become more explicitly favourable to GM food crops. The reason given was "vocal opposition among some Catholic laypeople and clergy". One cable said the Church in the Philippines would "go into schism" if the Vatican adopted a pro-GMO stance.

And readers may remember the Columban complaint about a pro-GM conference in Rome during May 2009, organised by the Pontifical Academy of Science. The Vatican issued a statement in December 2010 stating that the published conclusions of this study week "cannot be considered an official position of the Holy See or of the Magisterium of the Church on the topic".

Then, on 5 January, Cardinal Peter Turkson, Head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, said that making farmers reliant on GM seeds smacks of "the usual game of economic dependence" which in turn "stands out like a new form of slavery". He also revealed that some multinational companies are actively engaged in trying to persuade bishops in Africa to support greater use of genetically modified organisms. See <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1100033.htm>



Josephine Siedlecka of Independent Catholic News, Paul Donovan of The Universe and Ellen Teague attended the climate service and rally on 4 December 2010 to coincide with UN climate negotiations in Cancun.

## Nuclear weapons action

During December, the Columban Justice and Peace Office in Washington was amongst Catholic groups lobbying US senators to vote for Ratification of the START treaty, the much-delayed nuclear arms treaty that will pave the way for new cuts in American and Russian nuclear arsenals. The senators have now ratified the treaty which requires the US and Russia to cut their deployed nuclear warheads by some 30%, trimming them down to 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads each. It must still pass Russia's parliament, a move expected in the spring. The Columban office argued that, "this treaty is not only vital to our national interest in the fight against nuclear proliferation, but is essential in shifting focus towards long term global security and our moral obligation to respect the integrity of human life".

## Called to welcome the stranger

The Missionary Society of St. Columban in the US, along with 33 other faith-based organisations who work with migrants, released a Migrant Resolution in January calling for justice, dignity and democracy for all immigrants to the US. The Columban Justice and Peace office said, "we are called to not only welcome the stranger among us, but to also open ourselves to a transformation of the heart that occurs when we move out of ourselves and into relationship with those who are most vulnerable". See the full statement at: <http://columban.org/6587/columban-center-for-advocacy-and-outreach/cao-updates/usa-migrant-resolution-2010/>

## Korean martyrs commemorated

In Korea, where the Columbans have worked since 1933, artillery bombardment from the North last November was

the heaviest since the Korean War of 1950-53. Weeks earlier, on 20 October, Columbans in Ireland held a service to commemorate the 60th anniversary of events in 1950 when nine Columbans were arrested by the North Korean army and only two survived. Six of the Columbans were shot - one being Tony Collier, uncle of Ray Collier - and one died in a prison camp in North Korea after the torturous 'Death March' - a 100 mile trek north to the Chinese border in winter snow. Two survived the 'March' and three years of captivity afterwards. Irish Columban Tomas Quinlan went on to work for a further 15 years in Korea. Australian Philip Crosbie continued there for nearly 50 years.

## WoW Bags

Wonders of Waste bags are good quality bags made in the Philippines



Helen Mitchell with WoW bags workers.

out of discarded waste cartons. The makers include a group of women from a large urban poor community in Manila who live in a Columban-run parish. WoW also supports a project with Subaanen tribal people in Mindanao, linked to Columban mission there. It buys all the string for labels from this community at fair trade prices. Helen Mitchell, who set up the WoW project, comes from the Catholic parish in Hanwell, West London. If anyone wants to sell a box of WoW bags - which are excellent quality - at an event, Helen can be contacted direct at [helenbmitchell@hotmail.com](mailto:helenbmitchell@hotmail.com)

## IN SHORT...

**Westminster Archdiocese has produced an environmental policy**, undertaking to monitor carbon use and ensure that care for creation features on the diocesan website and in prayer, liturgy and education programmes. ([www.rcdow.org.uk](http://www.rcdow.org.uk))

**Archbishop Mario Conti of Glasgow denounced plans last November to remove 600 families of asylum seekers from their homes in Glasgow and resettle them elsewhere.** He said that, "the human cost of this decision is horrendous, and will involve children being uprooted from schools where they are flourishing plus a return to the anguish of the unknown for people already bearing a heavy burden of fear".

**Brazilian Catholic Bishop Erwin Kräutler has accepted the Right Livelihood Award, known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize'** for "a lifetime of work for the human and environmental rights of indigenous peoples and for efforts to save the Amazon forest from destruction".

# Action Ideas

## Romero remembered

In November 2010 the United Nations General Assembly declared **24 March** - the day of Archbishop Oscar Romero's assassination - as the **International Day for the Right to Truth on Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims**.

In UK, Fr Juan Hernandez Pico SJ from El Salvador will give the 2011 **Archbishop Romero Lecture** during the anniversary week 20-27 March. There will be evenings in Salford (22nd), Edinburgh (23rd), Newcastle (24th), and an ecumenical service at 11am on Saturday 26 March at St. Martin in the Fields, London.

And look out for a new film: **Monseñor: The Last Journey of Oscar Romero**. The film was made to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Romero's martyrdom in March 2010. [www.romerotrust.org.uk](http://www.romerotrust.org.uk)



*The Dean of Westminster, John Hall, points out to Pope Benedict XVI the statue of Archbishop Romero over the west door at Westminster Abbey. It stands alongside other twentieth century martyrs.*



Eyecatching materials to advertise the fortnight are available from the Fairtrade Foundation website [www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)



£7 inclusive of p&p from Columban JPIC Office, St. Joseph's, Watford Way, Hendon, London NW4 4TY. 020 8202 2555. Or view at [www.columbans.co.uk](http://www.columbans.co.uk)  
A good response to the AV would be to sign the London Declaration, the founding document of the **Mines and Communities** network, with which the Columbans work. The Declaration encapsulates key demands, made by many communities affected by mining around the world. See: <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/LondonDeclaration>

## USE THE NEW CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING WEBSITE

The *livesimply* network has launched a new website dedicated to Catholic Social Teaching. It is a valuable resource for parishes, schools and individuals wishing to deepen their understanding of faith and explore the link with social justice.

Launching the website at London's Heythrop College on Monday 29 November 2010, Bishop John Hine of Southwark Archdiocese, representing the patrons of *livesimply*, said the website would help to equip people to respond to the ecological, justice and peace challenges of the 21st Century, "because if our calling is to become more like Christ, then we will view what we are doing to our world and the injustices of our society as intolerable". Contributors include Columban Justice and Peace, South African Archbishops Desmond Tutu and Kevin Dowling, Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster, Archbishop of York John Sentamu, Mary Colwell, Bruce Kent and Paul Donovan. See: [www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk](http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk)



*Christine Allen of Progressio and Bishop John Hine of Southwark Archdiocese launch the new website.*

## A JOURNEY IN LOW-CARBON CHRISTIAN LIVING

Sign up to Ecocell 2. Ecocell 2 is a Christian Ecology Link (CEL) programme of personal, household and local action, undertaken by small groups in local areas over several years. Food is just one area where participants undertake carbon counts, and learn about ways of accounting for the energy used in agriculture, a meat-based diet, food transport, processing, shops and catering. Other elements of the programme look at Energy in the Home and Transport, all linked in with theological reflection. Contact the Coordinator, Tony Emerson, at [tony.emerson12@btopenworld.com](mailto:tony.emerson12@btopenworld.com).

An Ecocell 2 workshop will be available at CEL's spring day conference on 5 March titled, 'End of the Age of Thorns: Surviving Consumerism'. Speakers include PETER OWEN JONES and TIM COOPER. For more details and a booking form visit [www.christian-ecology.org.uk](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk).

## LENT RESOURCE

### DVD - Stations of the Rainforests.

This revised audio-visual incorporates more global issues related to rainforest destruction, such as the impact of extractive industries, loss of biodiversity and climate change. Links are revealed with human impoverishment and loss of livelihoods. A Resource Booklet provides the script, a meeting agenda, a reflection for each Station and liturgy material.

# Resources

## LENT RESOURCES

### Follow me - The Way of the Cross *Pax Christi*

With reflections from the writings of Franz Jägerstätter. Suitable for personal use or for leading the Stations in your church.

£2.50 from Pax Christi

### Show me your face *Pax Christi and SCIAF*

Daily reflections for Lent based on the Year A scripture readings. Written by Fr Gerry W. Hughes SJ.

£1.50 from Pax Christi  
020 8203 4884

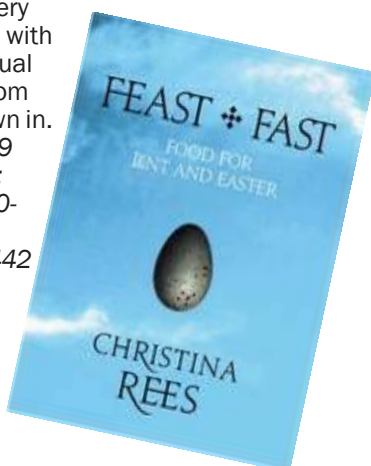


### Feast + Fast Food for Lent and Easter *Christina Rees*

The author takes us on a spiritual and culinary exploration of the Christian traditions around fasting and feasting in Lent and Easter. Divided into sections for breakfast, lunch and dinner, Christina examines the significance of each and includes recipes for quick but satisfying meals through the 40 days of Lent, leading up to an Easter feast to savour, rich in symbolism and style. A cookery book with spiritual wisdom thrown in.

£8.99

ISBN:  
978-0-232-528442



### God Doesn't Do Waste *Dave Bookless*

When Dave Bookless reviewed his attitude to the environment, this led to major changes, not only in his family's lifestyle but also - eventually - in his career: full-time involvement in the global A Rocha environmental movement. The book explains how in God's economy nothing need be wasted.

£7.99

ISBN:  
9781844744732



### Barbara Ward: Her Life and Letters *Jean Gartlan*

A major study of a prominent Catholic woman who was ahead of her time on many great issues such as tackling world poverty and conserving the environment. She often talked about "a duty to hope". From the 1940s until her death in 1982, Barbara Ward was an influential political economist, writer and early advocate of sustainable development. She was a founder member of *The Sword and the Spirit* in 1940 - renamed the *Catholic Institute for International Relations* in 1965 and more recently *Progressio*. She also founded the *International Institute for Environment and Development* in 1971. That same year she helped set up the *Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace*, and in 1971 was the first woman ever to address a synod of Catholic bishops.

ISBN: 9781441155573

### Fleeing Vesuvius: Overcoming the Risks of Economic and Environmental Collapse *Edited by Richard Douthwaite and Gillian Fallon*

Columban eco-theologian Sean McDonagh feels this book gives "energy and direction for a new sustainable vision for humankind and



every other species on earth". Articles analyse the mess we are in on multiple fronts - energy, food, water, critical infrastructures and financial collapse. Then many others present examples of what can be done to address the current crises.

£17.50

ISBN-13: 978-0954051013

### Conservation Refugees: The 100-Year Conflict between Global Conservation and Native Peoples *Mark Dowie*

Indigenous peoples, who occupy about 85% of around 100,000 protected areas worldwide, have often been displaced from ancestral lands in the interests of conservation, even though they have lived in harmony with their environment for tens of thousands of years. Many slide into poverty, and some even face extinction. The author criticises a vision of wilderness without people and suggests that the commons have been enclosed not only to facilitate conservation but extractive industries as well.

ISBN: 978-0-262-01261-4

Reviews at: <http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?tttype=2&tid=11679>

### The Banks and Society: Rebuilding Trust

A new report from the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility, available from March - [www.eccr.org.uk](http://www.eccr.org.uk).

Look out for the beautiful film *Of Gods and Men*, based on the story of seven French Cistercian monks killed in Algeria in 1996, amidst religious violence. The Prior's letter, opened after his death, in which he forgave his killer, is read at the end.

## VOCATION FOR JUSTICE

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Vocation for Justice is a publication of the Missionary Society of St. Columban (Maynooth Mission to China) Reg.Charity No.221594. It is produced three times a year. Names will be added to the mailing list on request.

Price £3.00 per issue. Subscriptions are requested every two years.