

Archdiocese of Southwark
Commission for
Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation



JPIC Update July 2010

Catholic Bible Search Engine Launched

"Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss"
Psalm 85

My first try at a new online Catholic Bible search engine, which enables people to find scripture passages using keywords, unearthed this quotation.

As well as enabling specific or approximate searches the search engine allows users, who make use of such Technology, to share Bible passages with their blogs, with Facebook and Twitter, and with other social media Web sites.

It also allows people to add a search facility to their own personal Web page.

The project was undertaken with partial funding from the U.S. bishops' conference, and with the help of volunteers from a Catholic.net social aid program in Mexico.

Rosalia Tenorio, director of Catholic.net, expressed the hope that this tool will "help the faithful in their Biblical studies and to facilitate Scripture sharing."

Bible search engine: <http://www.bible.catholic.net/>

Campaign against factory farming

Big agricultural companies are drawing up plans to open huge US-style factory farms for cows in the UK. Cows would be kept inside all year and fed on processed feed not grass. Animal and environment groups are warning that factory farms of this sort are likely to be bad for climate change, bad for cows, and bad for the rural economy.

All the proposals to build these 'mega-dairies' are in Lincolnshire. That means Lincolnshire County Council could play a key role in stopping this type of factory farming spreading to the UK.

There are so many reasons why this kind of factory farming is bad news. Factory farming relies on huge quantities of imported feed. To grow this feed, rainforest is chopped down, destroying wildlife and increasing climate change. Keeping cows indoors all year round can increase the risk of disease. Industrial milk production also threatens smaller, traditional dairy farms.

38degrees is calling on us to work together, to make sure Lincolnshire council feels under pressure from thousands of us to say "no". We know that campaigning against the factory farms can make a difference. Local protests have led to two plans for factory farms in Lincolnshire being

withdrawn. But the big agricultural companies will try again soon. We need to keep building the pressure and make sure people power stops these plans.

You can sign an on-line petition to Lincolnshire County Council now at <http://www.38degrees.org.uk/no-megadairies> or write to council leader, Martin Hill at Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, Newland, Lincoln, LN1 1YL

Corporate Responsibility and Ethical Investment

We all know that the actions of multinational companies can have a huge impact – for good or ill – on the well-being of communities around the world; and indeed on the fabric of the earth itself. We have seen dramatic examples recently in the global financial crisis and in the Deepwater oil disaster off the USA. But every day around the world the policy and practice of well-known companies with regard to human rights, employment, supply chains and environmental impact has a significant effect on the lives and livelihoods of communities, particularly on the poorest.

Christian faith calls us to work for justice and environmental stewardship. But often we feel helpless to change the actions of the powerful, be they governments or multinational companies. In fact we potentially have much more influence than we sometimes realise. The positive impact of consumer power has been graphically illustrated in recent years by the exponential growth of fair trade. We also have power as investors and shareholders.

All of us are, one way or another, investors in companies and therefore part owners. This may be directly through owning shares, or indirectly through our pension funds, savings, bank accounts and insurance policies, and through the church we belong to. Most church denominations are major shareholders.

Shareholders, as company owners, give companies their mandate to operate. What companies do, therefore, they do in our name. Investment entails responsibility. Awareness of this fact is a key ethic for Christians, and accepting this responsibility empowers us to realise that we can all participate in improving the policy and practices of companies.

There are three main aspects to ethical investment (sometimes referred to as 'socially responsible' or simply 'responsible' investment):

Negative - Choosing not to invest or to divest/disinvest from industry sectors, e.g. armaments, tobacco, gambling, pornography, or from companies with a poor record on human rights, environment, etc. (cont...)

Positive - Choosing specific good things to invest in, e.g. sectors like sustainable forestry, renewable energy, health care, & sustainable property, or the most responsible looking company in its particular sector. Micro-finance for small scale start up business, mainly in developing countries, and funding for social enterprise are becoming increasingly popular as positive investments, e.g. through Oikocredit, Shared Interest, and Big Issue Invest. Sometimes investors choose to accept a lower return than the current market average for this sort of investment in recognition of the additional social return generated.

Engagement - Talking to those multinational companies in which investments are held to try to improve one or several aspects of their corporate responsibility. If the dialogue does not progress satisfactorily, shareholders can make their concerns more public, e.g. through questions and voting at the company AGM, and by filing a shareholder resolution, e.g. shareholder resolutions on tar sands extraction at the 2010 AGMs of BP and Shell.

ECCR (the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility) is a membership organisation which ties together corporate responsibility and ethical investment issues by undertaking research, advocacy and dialogue to encourage companies to meet higher standards of corporate responsibility, while assisting churches and their members to make investment decisions which further this work through responsible and positive impact investment. ECCR's website www.eccr.org.uk has lots of information about current issues, ideas for action, and the chance to sign up for a monthly e-newsletter and to become a member or make a donation to support ECCR's work.

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Book Review: 'PROSPERITY WITHOUT GROWTH'

The author of this book is Tim Jackson, the Economics Commissioner on the Sustainable Development Commission, which is the UK government's independent adviser on sustainable development. He is also Professor of Sustainable Development at the University of Surrey and Director of the ESRC Research Group on Lifestyles, Values and Environment.

Speaking at the annual conference of Church Action on Poverty he said: "I have found that it is very challenging to suggest to governments that economic growth is part of the problem we face, and that we need a different kind of economy." That is what this book is about.

He puts forward two key problems. The first is this: our present economy is based on material growth. It has been assumed that economic growth will bring prosperity both to the developed and the developing worlds. But in fact this has not happened. Growth has brought prosperity in financial terms to only a few, not to the majority of the

world's population. The gap between rich and poor has widened at an alarming rate. We have an economy based on debt, and this has led only to financial collapse. The "growth economy" then has failed.

But the second key problem is even more significant. We live in a finite system - our planet earth. A finite system puts limits on exponential growth. Put simply, we cannot continue to use up the world's resources by pursuing the present kind of economic growth for ever. The argument that we can solve this problem by being more efficient or technologically inventive only delays the inevitable collapse.

Facing these two problems leads Jackson to the crucial issue - what do we mean by "prosperity"? What we have at present is a materialistic view of flourishing: money and possessions, ever greater consumption, are the ingredients of the good life. But the evidence shows the falsity of this view. Improvements (growth) in this sphere do not bring contentment, but only the desire for more at a frightening ecological price.

However, there is an alternative economy which enables us to flourish - something other than the culture of consumption. Granted the basics of sufficient housing, clothing, food for reasonable sustenance, there must be the elements which allow all to participate meaningfully in the life of society and this involves such things as love, friendship, community, and all that gives meaning and purpose to life. Moreover it must be a flourishing within ecological limits.

Two conclusions stem from this alternative view of prosperity. First - although we can act as individuals to "live simply" (and this is vital) there has to be an overall strategy whereby the whole community, whether local, national, or global, live within our planetary limits. This means there has to be governance which organises an economy that is not based on material growth. This will involve such things as establishing the limits of resource use, and fiscal reform for sustainability. Secondly we have to change the mind-set of society from the consumerist model to a willingness to appreciate that alternative "flourishing" which has been described. This will involve such moves as stronger regulation of the commercial media, and strengthening those things which make for stronger communities (the Transition Town movement is an example of the latter).

Clearly this is a book which deals with vital issues. The vision of a different way of flourishing is in harmony with major elements in Catholic Social Teaching, expressed by the Bishops in *Choosing the Common Good*: "The common good is about how to live well together. It is the whole network of social conditions which enable individuals and groups to flourish and live a full, genuinely human life."

Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth*, Earthscan, 2009, ISBN 978-1-84407-894-3, £12.99.

Thanks to *Bryan Halson*