

A Just Transition: From The World As It Is To The World As It Could Be

by Sue Wilson, CSJ

In her writing on *Impasse and Dark Night*, Constance Fitzgerald, the scholar of Carmelite mysticism, insists “**our experience of God and our spirituality must emerge from our concrete, historical situation to feed it and enliven it.**” This article reflects on this wisdom from three different perspectives.

Part One

Our concrete, historical situation

One week, two history-making global events. The first a soul-searing tragedy; the second a mind-numbing report. Two critical nexus points between them: our dependence on fossil fuels and injustice.

In Putin’s utterly horrifying and unprovoked launching of a war against Ukraine, we have witnessed attacks on civilians, the heartbreaking movement of (to date) more than 2.2 million refugees from Ukraine to surrounding countries, and the reckless shelling of a nuclear facility. While dependence on fossil fuels was not the cause of the conflict, its presence is woven throughout, providing a main source of funding for Putin’s war and being the reason European countries have been unable to ban oil and gas imports from Russia. As a result, fossil fuel dependence leaves European governments unintentionally subsidizing Putin’s war.

Still, the war in Ukraine is shaking up the status quo by motivating western governments to begin transitioning away from fossil fuels from Russia, if not from fossil fuels themselves. Anything that presses against the inertia around fossil fuel dependence is welcome, especially given the release, of the second major news event of the week -- the release of the report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “**Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability**,” written by 270 researchers from 67 countries.

The report gives a disturbingly detailed look at the threats posed by global warming, those already experienced and those still on the way. It concludes that climate change is already harming the planet more quickly than we can adapt: Rising heat, floods and drought are devastating crops, trees, species, and eco-systems. Millions of people worldwide, mostly in the Global South, are at increased risk of hunger and malnutrition. While approximately half the world’s population currently faces severe water scarcity at least part of the year. As the earth experiences these intersecting crises, the need to shift away from a fossil-fueled economy has never been so clear.

Some reflections begin to emerge:

- It was amazing to see the speed with which countries moved to support Ukraine. As a global community, we showed the capacity to unite in response to a crisis. The IPCC

report is telling us that climate change is a crisis of even greater proportions. United Nations secretary general António Guterres called the report “an atlas of human suffering.” The report also shows that our response to climate issues is a question of justice: Habitats for plants and animals are being destroyed. People in the Global South, Indigenous peoples, and lower-income populations are more severely impacted and face increased marginalization due to climate change.

- The actions which governments and corporations have taken in response to the invasion of Ukraine have disrupted already-turbulent supply chains and markets, contributing to growing inflationary pressures. Despite the turbulence, citizens have been largely supportive, wanting to stand with Ukraine. On the other hand, with respect to climate change, we already are hearing calls to drop the carbon tax in Canada because it might make things more expensive. The dissonance is dizzying.

- Our necessary responses both to the invasion of Ukraine and to climate change are already leading to increased costs. The impacts are most severe for people living in poverty. There is a moral imperative for governments to address this financial injustice in a speedy and ongoing manner. This means government benefits to counter increased costs in the short-term, but it also points to the need to address inequalities in the labour market, with too many jobs no longer providing pathways out of poverty.

- The welcome with which Ukrainian refugees have been received in neighbouring countries is heartwarming and sets the standard for how every refugee should be received. It also raises disturbing questions about the extent to which racial and religious intolerance have played a role in the lack of welcome experienced by so many other refugees still waiting to be allowed to cross borders. We will need to look closely at such questions because the number of climate refugees will continue to increase.

Part Two

“Our experience of God and our spirituality must emerge from our concrete, historical situation to feed it and enliven it.”

Our experience of God and our spirituality emerge

Too often, we have heard Fitzgerald’s insight in an individualistic way, opening to God only in our individual experiences and allowing our spirituality to emerge primarily from the events of our personal life. But, when we consider the above-mentioned snapshots of our shared concrete, historical situation, we can discern hints of God’s image, presence, and activity in the world:

- In the concern we felt at the shelling of the nuclear station in Ukraine or the fragility in the face of climate change impacts, there is a growing awareness that human choices and actions now have planetary-wide impacts. Are we not being summoned to

understand ourselves more fully as co-members of creation, and to see how St. Paul's assertion that "in Christ we live and move and have our being" is true for all creation-members.

- The multiple intersections between fossil fuel dependence and injustice are wake-up calls, pointing us toward a deeper appreciation of the interconnections and interactions at the heart of life. This deeper appreciation invites us to a spirituality of solidarity and hints at our common planetary destiny. For Christians, this perspective can bring new levels of insight to the image of the 'body of Christ.'

- In the deepening capacity of countries to work together to support Ukraine, and the potential for continuing this deeper collaboration to address the climate emergency, we glimpse how even suffering death and injustice hold within them the possibilities for new life, healing, and wholeness.

- In the horrific events unfolding in Ukraine, devastating climate change impacts, and deepening inequality, we sense a God who is insulating us from nothing but rather strengthening, sustaining, and guiding us in everything. Through grace, we are always being prepared, indeed urged, to act for justice. God puts change in our hands.

Part Three

"Our experience of God and our spirituality must emerge from our concrete, historical situation to feed it and enliven it."

To feed it and enliven it

Through grace, we are always being prepared, indeed urged, to act for justice.

Do we value our democracy as much as the people of Ukraine? Are we ready to create a stronger foundation for our democracy by shaping relationships of justice which allow all to participate fully in the goods of our society?

A Just Transition is about moving from the world as it is to the world as it could be. It's about tackling climate change and injustice together since both require a new economic model – shifting from a model grounded in extraction and exploitation of the planet and people to one rooted in care for the planet, people, and all species.

The 'world as it could be' will forge new patterns and structures for our economic relationships:

- Phasing out fossil fuels, shifting government subsidies from fossil fuels to green energy, ramping up the production of green energy, implementing energy

efficiencies in buildings, developing new green technologies and skills training for high-quality employment.

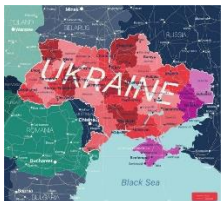
- Strengthening labour standards and regulations to ensure all jobs are good jobs; increasing access to strong social protections to ease transitions between jobs for all workers.
- Respecting Indigenous environmental leadership and self-determination as they chart their own unique paths toward a decarbonized future.
- Developing a care economy rooted in both care of ecosystems and care of one another at all stages of life.
- Acknowledging the responsibilities that come from our history of high per capita carbon emissions by welcoming climate migrants and funding tools to help countries in the Global South reduce emissions, adapt to climate impacts, and rebuild after climate change damages.
- Creating a culture of solidarity which includes raising taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations while also eliminating tax avoidance and loopholes.

If Canada and other democratic countries can truly make a Just Transition, we would provide a beacon to people in authoritarian regimes of what can be.

The government of Canada has already committed itself to a Just Transition but so far, little action has been taken. Faith communities can be instrumental in ensuring Canada develops a robust plan.

The Federation's Office for Systemic Justice is partnering with many civil society groups in Canada to advocate for policies to create a strong plan for a Just Transition.

You can join in this work by going to <https://350.org/canada/> to add your name to a petition calling for Canada to make the Just Transition Act a priority.





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