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A Visit to Canada

I need help sorting out my feelings.

Desmond Tutu's visit to our Canadian oil sands on Saturday, May 31, 2014 has created an emotional storm within me. His assessment of Canada's energy oil sector is disturbing, describing it as negligent and driven by greed. Journalists following the visit have pushed back, calling Tutu uninformed and too simplistic ("Tutu's illogical oil sands dream", *National Post*, June 2, 2014).

It is hard to know what to think. Economy is an important factor. The *National Post* article estimates that the oil and gas extraction employs more than 120,000 Albertans and will provide combined provincial-federal tax revenue of nearly 80 billion dollars by 2035. This is no small matter. However, to be fair the article should have also provided estimated tax revenue and employment figures if Canada were to rapidly increase green energy research and development.

Tutu is charged with unfairly placing blame on the oil industry when in fact, according to the article, Canadian consumers are increasingly rejecting energy efficient vehicles in favour of gas guzzling cars and trucks. That is a fair critique. However, consumer purchasing practices did not support society's decision to ban public smoking or raise the alarm of unhealthy fast food consumption.

As a church leader, I struggle. I have no desire to be engaged in argumentative political debate. But sometimes our commitment to following Christ propels us into undesired dispute. If governments initiate military action to defend easy access to global resources, I think God calls us into dispute. If governments disregard the disadvantaged in favour of the disproportioned elite, I think God calls us into dispute.

Tutu's visit stirred up the climate justice debate. But I think the debate remains misguided. The call to quickly wean ourselves off of fossil fuels is growing louder. Resisters paint an illogical picture of global societies being confined to bicycles. Rather, we need the imagination of active societies fueled by green energy alternatives.

I feel conflicted. I struggle with the impulse to be quiet and mind my own business. Yet I wrestle with the sense that God is asking communities of faith to be an alternative voice; a voice that humbly stands in solidarity with our children and their future. It is not right if current economics sacrifices future quality of life. I cannot shake the history of South African apartheid. The struggle for equality continued for a long time before the statements of the Church emerged as a significant voice. Desmond Tutu represents that voice; a voice that helped mobilize the church across South Africa and the world.

Now that voice has seen it necessary to step into our context. As a Canadian church leader I feel deeply challenged. When a global defender of human rights feels it necessary to speak about my "neighbourhood", I feel gently confronted and lovingly rebuked. I need help sorting out my feelings. Perhaps I am misguided by emotion, but today I cannot help but feel shamed.

This article originally appeared on Willard's blog. For more articles by Willard, visit: willardmetzger.blogspot.ca