

Morally Responsible Investment: Stewardship Challenge to the Churches

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I wish to share my experience of the World Council of Churches' Assembly, which met recently at Porto Alegre-Brazil. It was the most challenging Assembly of the four World Council of Churches I have attended, marked by a rich prayer life and inspiring bible studies.

There were about 200 workshops out of which 18 were on economic justice dealing with ethical investments. [The issues raised looked at how responsible investing could help eradicate poverty and contribute towards sustainable development that would provide decent work, protect human dignity and preserve the integrity of creation.]

I was personally very challenged by the workshop that dealt with the 'right to water' and the crisis of water resulting from its corporate commercialisation. The issues raised have special relevance for South Africa because of our Constitution and Bill of Rights which states that everyone should have access to sufficient water.

A country such as South Africa, which has clean and healthy water, is made to buy bottled water instead of drinking purified tap water. Most rivers of the developing countries are polluted by the very multinationals which commercialise water and then purify water for sale. After the workshop, I resolved never to drink bottled water or to buy it unless I am assured that the only other water available is likely to be badly polluted or poisoned by toxic waste. As church leaders we should lead by example by refusing to buy and drink commercialised water.

This is where the question of morally responsible investment comes in. As stewards of God's money, the Church should be intentional about ethical investment. Critical questions should be asked: Is it morally responsible to invest with corporations that pollute rivers? Should we invest God's money in corporations that commercialise basic commodities such as water? I believe the Church must invest in businesses whose economy is in the service of life and not in those who impoverish people and communities.

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