

Reclaimers of the Commons: Motivation for Activists

Activists such as the Occupiers of Wall Street and many others immersed in social justice issues need motivation to continue their struggle. Experience accumulated over four decades of public interest work yields ever-deepening levels of activism.

The first level involves a growing awareness that our familiar home, the **HERE** of our lives, the locality that we know so well is under attack. This unique place is being harmed by exploitation and misuse. The budding activist reacts by facing the problem head on, but soon realizes that inexperience may worsen the damage. Thus, the temptation is to take on the role of a prophet: a singular public witness; a willingness to risk being unpopular; and a call for greater action by detailing the damage. However, activists know that theoretical discussion is not enough; this arena needs a practical, down-to-earth spirituality.

A second level emerges when the activist grasps the increasing urgency of the environmental crisis and is impelled to do something **NOW** about it. Choices to be agents of change include violent action, voluntary work at repairing damage done, or even a hidden and singular action by a modern-day Robin Hood. Often discernment is neglected due to urgency to act. However, confrontation reveals the complexity of the problem. Many find excuses for they regard themselves as lacking in skills to carry on the fight. They see that merely tweaking a dysfunctional system may lessen the impact of the damage, but it does not address the deeper environmental crisis. Compassion calls for more, and so activists look farther.

A third level of growing awareness recognizes the inadequacy of impulsive and isolated actions by prophets and agents of change. **WE** need cooperative efforts by the global community. The environmental crisis is more than our locality and takes more than local action. Joining forces by like-minded activists allows for the solidarity of having strength and effectiveness in numbers. The call goes out for joint efforts by all believers in a better world. However, the environmental crisis involves over-consumption of resources first by the material privileged and then by a stampeding middle class wanting to do the same. Involvement and tolerance of privileges only compounds a social addiction.

A fourth level of awareness is when we discover that we cannot do this task well because consumer-based addictions infest us all. **WE**, as weakened people, acknowledge our social addiction to consumer goods and call out because we are weak. We must have recourse through prayer and spiritual renewal to a **HIGHER POWER** -- the basic impulse of any individual addict of substance abuse. Through prayer, we can undertake the actions needed to build a better world. Amazingly, Americans must reaffirm our national motto "In God we trust." A new empowerment in the mystery of resurrection looms before activists, for a new world is possible.

Al Fritsch, SJ