

Shaking foundations

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On my bike ride home from the train station, I see a church sign: "Shaking Foundations? God is Big Enough to Hold Onto." I assume that the person who put this sign up was thinking about economic or personal foundations, was trying to speak to the heightened anxiety that has its grip on our society.

But I can't help but think of another shaking foundation. Last week in Philadelphia, members of 65 organizations gathered in a rally (described by some as "raucous") to oppose rules that would allow fracking--a method of extracting natural gas--to go forward in Pennsylvania.

Fracking is literally the breaking up of the earth's bedrock to release deeply buried pockets of methane. Concerns about the practice are widespread and include contaminated ground water and wells as well as the irreversibility of destroying the very foundation of the earth.

I am struck by the troubling idea of intentionally shaking our own foundations in the name of our intractable addiction to fossil fuels. I find myself thinking in psalmic terms, like Psalm 46: "The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts."

In Colorado, where I live, mining industries literally took down mountains just a generation ago, leaving large gaping pits in their places. In the process, they left vast fields of fetid water and ongoing toxic drainage troubles. The economic result was not prosperity. Instead, it was very much like the dire prediction that Doug Shields, president of Pittsburgh's city council [made](#) at the rally last week: the industry "will leave us all with a legacy of woe and want. They're going to walk away from this with trillions of dollars, while we pay through the nose."

Churches have a critical role to play in these conversations. Perhaps one of the greatest gifts Christians have to offer is a rich and ancient vocabulary that can connect the welfare of humankind to the welfare of the earth. When it comes to an

issue as volatile and devastating as fracking, it is time to put that vocabulary to work.