Send in the Clowns
Transition and Hope
Imagination and Resistance in Action
Green Christian
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Editor
Chris Walton, Ringsfield EcoCentre, Beccles, Suffolk NR34 8JR
T: 07881 941296
E: GreenEditor@aol.com

Editorial Committee
Deborah Tomkins, Deidra Munro, Ashley Raiston, Paul Bodenham, Barbara Echlin, Westley Ingram.
Book Review Editor Miriam Pepper

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Cover: This image of the clown was given to me by a young Christian artist back in the 1980s when as minister of The Church of the Redeemer (a radical Baptist Church in Birmingham) I declared that in order to preach the gospel and live as a disciple we need to become clowns. I was just 30 something then. Now 35 years later, I believe it all the more passionately (for Send in the Clowns, see p.20).

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Christian Ecology Link
www.greenchristian.org.uk

Christian Ecology Link (CEL) is an interdenominational UK Christian organisation for people concerned about the environment. It offers insights into ecology and the environment to Christian people and Churches and offers Christian insights to the Green Movement.

Chairman
Paul Bodenham, Corner Cottage, Main Street, Langar, Nottingham NG13 9HE
T: 01949 861516
E: paul@christian-ecology.org.uk

Treasurer
Eleanor Orr, 35 Kitto Road, London SE14 5TW.
T: 020 7732 6550
E:eleanoro@howzatt.demon.co.uk

Membership Secretary
Richard and Nicky Kierton, Flat 1, 31 St James Terrace, Buxton SK17 6HS

Press office and requests for speakers
Jo Abbess, CEL Information Officer, 10 Beech Hall Road, London E4 9NX.
T: 0845 459 8460
E: info@christian-ecology.org.uk

Resource Materials
Jill Vogler, 40 The Avenue, Roundhay, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS8 1JG

Privacy
Members have occasionally asked for the addresses of other members who live near them, and we have sent out a county list.

If you do not wish to be included, please notify the Membership Secretary.

Basis of Faith
We affirm our belief in God as Creator of all things and in Jesus Christ as Lord, looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance through the Scriptures, and seeking to hear Him in the challenges of the present time.

Patrons
Rt Rev James Jones, Fr Sean McDonagh, Sir Jonathon Porritt, Prof Sir Ghillean Prance, Dr Elaine Storey
Send in the Clowns

Prophets and Clowns – imagination and resistance in action

Chris Walton and Ross Ashley introduce the clown

Why the image of a clown?

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of humans. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.*

Philippians 2.5-8

This is the role of the clown: not the circus clown, more the court jester. Not the slapstick artist, more the fool on the edge of things, willing to be clown enough to seek the kingdom of God without any expectation of any reward or blessing.

Jesus was made into a clown. The prophet is a clown. You make yourself nobody, empty yourself, to be filled by the earth’s agenda. We are a community of prophets and clowns, anonymous but not defeated; in the minority but not hopeless; easily ridiculed but not destroyed; resilient but not dogmatic; open-minded as a community but not giving up easily. Prophets and clowns are willing to be vulnerable, laying themselves open by acting as servants in a world which despises weakness, lack of ambition and difference.

In the Summer of 2008 Paul Bodenham, Chair of CEL (see GC65) invited us to engage the heart in our eco-praxis. His ‘Liberation Cycle’ has sustained us over the years – See, grieve, hope, act. We take another look at this cycle of intentional vulnerability for clowns and prophets.

See

Where are the clowns?*

Many years ago in my early years in pastoral ministry I developed the process of working from experience to the Bible, rather than the other way round.

Understanding the contemporary context and offering that up to the story of the Bible produced a powerful hermeneutic, which opened up space for members of my Churches to imagine-against-the-stream. My preaching did not provide a restful, inner sense of peace, a way of moving closer to God’s ‘still waters’ (Psalm 23:2), despite what is going on in the world but rather, an honest assessment of a situation and the poetry to inspire ‘a shared willingness to engage in gestures of resistance and acts of deep hope’.

Grieve

Where are the clowns?*

Prophetic consciousness knows that there is no newness without grief. The appalling plight of the suffering earth, the statistics of death and destruction of all species can only bring us on our knees with grief. Acknowledgement of our own weaknesses and failures comprehensively results in tears. If we never shed a tear, it’s like saying there’s nothing wrong; we are in denial. ‘Weeping is a theologically-grounded act of resistance’.

Act

There ought to be clowns*

Jesus demanded not only that we love our friends but our enemies too; not only that we preach and pray, but that we feed the hungry, visit those in prison, clothe the naked, care for the whole earth community. It is in our actions offering the poor hospitality, resisting the tide of injustice and poverty which the powers that rule the earth use to destroy the earth itself that we learn what it really means to be clowns (fools) for Christ’s sake. Only then will the bruised and bleeding community of Christ pour out fresh healing and hope in an age of devastating despair.

Hope

Send in the Clowns*

CEL member, Ross Ashley articulates the Storm of Hope as wild foolishness. As it sees and grieves hope acts as though stories can be changed, and it is we who must change them. It is the living out of what one envisages as though the story has changed, believing it can change. Hope will believe in a determined, imaginative way, and can work as a powerful, peaceful underground – a resistance. This will mean action – fighting for change, exposing the areas where fear rules quietly, and perhaps most importantly working on the edge, being prepared to be judged a fool, making sacrifices, making noises, insisting on being heard, regardless of whether it is seen to win or be proved right.

Send in the Clowns

Don’t bother, they’re here!*

This issue indicates that the CEL community’s prophets and clowns are out and about. It does not mean acceptance, the world does not immediately welcome us as we stagger belatedly into the arena. Some will ask where we’ve been all this time, some castigate us for our ‘politics’. Others will cling to their private God, others stare and laugh at our servanthood, others simply ignore us.

We’ll just continue on the journey of becoming ordinary clowns, like Jesus, in extraordinary times. ■

* see p.20
Transition and Hope - from Head, to Heart, to Hand

John Whitehead reminds us that ‘we are the prophetic presence of the living and risen Jesus Christ’

Introduction

The purpose of this article on Transition is to set this world’s present day challenges in the context of a global covenant theology. It argues that Transition Towns, a secular movement connecting Head, to Heart, to Hand, has a theological dimension which makes more incisive and inclusive a belief in God’s Covenant with the whole ‘biotic’ community – a concern which is noticeably muted in Church debates. The underpinning theological ‘given’ is the ever-urgent call for Christians to proclaim the Gospel ‘to the ends of the earth’, in the conviction that the Kingdom proclaimed and the Covenant enacted by Jesus means this-worldly transformation, ‘on earth as in heaven’.

New Initiatives

Today’s mindset is increasingly contoured by media pressures, global commerce and centralised government. Yet it is also evident that pressing global issues have led to movements like Transition Towns and the Low Carbon Communities Network, which aim to reverse the damage caused by exploiting the global at the expense of the local. In Rural Theology 68 Vol. 5 Part 1 (2007) Edward Echlin notes that ‘Distant (and eroding) fields that grow food for our supermarkets, and the sprawling estates built on fertile soil, are no substitute for the security of carefully nurtured and familial bioregional hinterlands’ (p.4). Following the recent head-lined exposure of unidentified horse meat in beef burgers, many are asking, what precisely is in their packaged food, and where does it originate? – in ‘distant fields’ (and processing) certainly!

The Transition movement’s evangelical purpose is to move from global dependence to local resilience. Since its inception in 2005, inspired by the young permaculture designer Rob Hopkins at Kinsale, Ireland, it has mushroomed into some 400 community groups, including ventures in the USA and South America. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall writes: ‘My first experience of Transition came in 2008, when I travelled to Totnes to film a sequence about Garden Share, a project that matched people who wanted to grow food but had nowhere to do it with people who had unused or underused gardens around the town. It was a brilliantly simple initiative, and above all a practical one that was getting a great response’ – The Transition Companion, Hopkins (2011 p.12 ). There is a clear resonance here with the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, where he preached and healed within local situations, yet also at the same time he reached out beyond family and friends – ‘to the one who asks from you, give...’ (Luke 6, 30). Thus motivated, there appeared communities of solidarity and mutual caring in the early church (Acts 2, 43,44).

The parallel between Christianity and Transition can be discerned in the word ‘biotic’ – a term brought to the writer’s attention by an American correspondent Daniel Deffenbaugh. In Learning the Language of the Fields: Tilling and Keeping as a Christian Vocation (2006), Deffenbaugh argues: ‘Christ is neither cosmic nor particular but a mediation of the two: Christ is a biotic community in which meaningful being becomes incarnate as “being with”, that is, as the experience of having entered into mutually-affirming relationships with others who share my life-place.’ Thus ‘biotic’ refers to the integrated functioning of all that lives and moves and has being, inclusive of people as well as environment. The earth on which all living depends is enfolded in the ‘biotic community’, and is the place where Kingdom and Transition are to happen. The process ‘from head, to heart, to hand’ expresses ‘biotic community’ in practice. Ellen Davis in Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: an Agrarian Reading of the Bible (2009) portrays the divine covenant as a moral economy. Referring to the Old Testament Holiness Code she explains that ‘its point of orientation is the web of relationships uniting the various members of the land community: earth animals and humans’ (p.90). The implication of the story of Naboth’s vineyard is that ‘A healthy economy is part of an authentic local culture’. She provides a contemporary illustration from Cedar Grove, a small community in North Carolina. Grieved by rifts in the community:

‘A lifelong member of the community, a woman whose grandfather had been born into slavery, offered five acres of land to Cedar Grove United Methodist for the purpose of planting a community vegetable garden. Now Asians, Mexicans, Hondurans, African and European Americans, Christians and non-Christians, poor and relatively rich, work that land together, and have weekly dinners on the ground. The older farmers contribute their local knowledge and their manure – things that no one had seemed to value before. The food...’

...
The Church Dimension

Here Rob Hopkins makes a point strongly felt by many: 'it seems clear that a great deal of damage and wounding has gone on in the world in the name of organised religions, and of spirituality in general, and so some people are very wary indeed about the whole issue', though he goes on to say 'it is perhaps necessary that no one in any sense "pushes" his or her spiritual approach, but, equally, this whole area of human experience is not unwelcome.' (op.cit. p.141). So there is an opportunity here if members of Churches can set light to “the Church” as structure, ministers, orientation ... and remember that 'we are the prophetic presence of the living and risen Jesus Christ' Echlin (2010 p.106).

Transition in Practice

Ashton Hayes, a village of 1,000 people near Chester, where action was started by the Low Carbon Communities Network, gave this information on its webpage:

The pub has been the meeting place for many of our team meetings and in recent years all the landlords have been very supportive of the project and are keen to welcome visitors. Initially the brainchild of local resident Garry Charnock, the project was adopted by the Parish Council in November 2005, and officially launched at a public meeting held in Ashton Hayes Primary School on 26th January 2006. The launch meeting was a huge success, attended by 400 people. Awareness-raising with residents has cut the carbon footprint of the village’s households by 20% in 12 months. Tree planting is helping to offset remaining emissions.

clerk@ashtonhayespc.co.uk

From a theological perspective, the underlying narrative of the Hebraic Covenant with the whole creation, when allied to Christ’s mission on earth as portrayed in the Gospels, enunciates a deep-rooted sense of divine providence. This still underpins particularly the mindset of those who have grown up in the countryside. The writer remembers a farmer in the parish whom he knew on the school governors committee – not a person who attended Church – saying after a difficult summer: 'you know, vicar, seedtime and harvest shall not fail'. Through imaginative projects, this traditional sense of provision and redeeming can meld with the altruistic, community-oriented purposes seen in Transition projects and Low Carbon Communities.

Believing and Behaving Hopefully

Transition initiatives are succeeding because of their underlying ethic of collaboration, persons in relationship, which enables the local outsourcing of carbon footprint reduction to take off. What the Transition movement promotes is a wellbeing that lies in a vibrancy of pace, and of life-styles and methods of local economy which both respect the actual environment, and also epitomise the action which is required on a global scale. From this perspective, supra-local and supra-national agencies have a role as enablers, not as exploiters.

Yes, prophets have always warned, "There will be Blood"… but the blood of God’s cosmic Covenant leads from death to life by its future vision. The world of the 21st century, according to many respected observers, has reached a critical juncture, where ‘business as usual’ could end in the partial destruction of civilisation in many places – and where 2030 will be the ‘Age of Stupid’, a catastrophic judgement on short-term self-seeking, because the warning signs were resisted. Of course the Transition programme cannot be equated directly with the inauguration of the Kingdom. It has a this-worldly focus without a transcendental salvation. However, more and more people caught up in the Transition movement realise that material welfare alone “is not it” – as the Alpha Course poster puts it. Such people, while not ignoring the complexity of the issues, have driving convictions, and they are attuned to the realities of the environmental situation both globally and locally. They demonstrate a sensitive and caring listening to ‘the other’, be that human or natural, which those of faith would see as spiritual qualities. Many thoughtful Christians are among them, as an identifying of the personnel involved in the current Food Banks in urban centres will reveal.

The word covenant, voiced by political leaders striving for a Climate Change consensus between nation states, implies a theology of hope, which indicates that this world’s relationship with God will in the end not be sundered by any catastrophe, human or natural. Yes, as prophets have always warned, There will be Blood – title of the recent film in which Daniel Day-Lewis stars as the American oil developer confronted by the local preacher – but the blood of God’s cosmic Covenant, celebrated at every Lord’s Supper, leads from death to life. Theologically-speaking the Transition movement shows that in some form ‘Kingdom come’ really is hope in these uncertain times. ■

Bibliography


John Whitehead is a freelance retired parish priest around South Cheshire; formerly vicar of Betley and Keele. In the 1990s he chaired the Rural Theology Association and edited Rural Theology; he was joint editor of Seasonal Worship from the Countryside (SPCK, 2003). He is currently secretary of Christian Rural Concern which jointly developed the Christian Rural and Environmental Studies course (CRES) with the John Ray Initiative.
Not Screechers but Believers

Edward Echlin replies to Sam Norton

On the pages of Green Christian Sam Norton plants his new banner as an anthropogenic climate change sceptic. He now distances himself from fellow green Christians who accept scientific global warming consensus. The Green plea for urgent mitigating of damaging emissions he describes as ‘the climate screech’. Norton compares warnings of ‘ecological catastrophe’ to ‘the eschatological prophecies of the hellfire preacher’. Meanwhile, Tim Flannery – eminent Australian zoologist and Chief Commissioner of the Australian Climate Change Commission – warns, ‘Now more than ever we are in a race against time to avoid a catastrophic outcome.’

Norton generously invites other green Christians, whether sceptics or believers, to join him. The green movement, he rightly argues, is an inclusive community. Norton’s own rather complacent position seems to be that we should leave things to God who ‘will sort things out’ in the future. While critical of fundamentalist preachers, he quotes a passage from the exilic prophet Jeremiah, written for a very different, and ancient near-Eastern, context than today’s Osborne-fed growth path to climatic nemesis: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29.11). Norton argues that God will in the future bring good even out of climate change. Here I cannot fully share Norton’s complacency. For the kingdom in which we hope is mystery. A consistent theme in the Jewish Scriptures, Jesus’ Scriptures, is that human hubris brings nemesis. Today’s pervasive hubris is described, in what Norton might describe as a climate screech, by CEL’s patron Jonathon Porritt, ‘the sad truth is that a disturbingly large percentage of UK consumers are either too lazy or too indifferent to lead a more sustainable lifestyle’.

Since erratic weather is a symptom of looming climate change, we may already experience nemesis, as for example, in biodiversity loss and burning forests in Tim Flannery’s Australia, and in UK floods and droughts with their attendant human and other animal suffering. While we share Norton’s hope we recall that his prophet Jeremiah also warns of nemesis following idolatrous hubris: ‘A voice on the bare heights is heard, the weeping and pleading of Israel’s sons, because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the Lord their God’ (Jeremiah 3.21; cf. Deuteronomy 11.16). The Bible also abounds with hope, pre-eminently in the life, teaching and reconciling death and resurrection of Jesus, who as our very name Christian Ecology Link testifies, is Lord of all CEL supporters. Our hope in the kingdom includes reformed climate change sceptics and even sinners like myself. But I must insist that we remain humbly apophatic, reticent about describing that ‘new heaven and new earth’ in which we hope.

Norton, dismissing warnings of possible catastrophe as ‘the climate screech’, cites Matthew’s Jesus’ parable of the wheat and tares, saying God ‘will sort things out’ in the end.

Editor’s Note
In the last issue of Green Christian (GC74) I made a controversial decision to include the article, Of Wheat and Tares (and Catastrophic Anthropogenic Global Warming Sceptics) by Sam Norton (p.10). I decided that our Editorial policy covered the article, that is: ‘The opinions expressed by guest authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors but are welcome for their sincerity and insight’. I asked for response and here it is.

A NEW SPEAK CAMPAIGN
Seeding Change

SPEAK call for justice in the global food system
It’s been germinating beneath the ground for several years, and now it’s finally here, launching at Soundcheck 2013 – a SPEAK campaign focusing on the injustices of agribusiness.

Food and drink are profoundly human. Yet our global food system is broken; as we see through land grabs, biofuels, food waste, over-consumption of meat and dairy, supermarket power, farmers squeezed, banks betting on food, monopolisation of the seed markets, over-reliance on heavy fertilisers and pesticides that ravage the Earth...not to mention global hunger.

Therefore we’re doing something about it! Focusing on LAND (which the Old Testament prophets often focused upon) and SEEDS (which Jesus used as pictures of life and power), we want to see an end to land grabs and farming done in a more sustainable way. Essentially, we believe that:

All food should be grown and shared as though people and planet mattered.

http://www.speak.org.uk/
I’m Screeching - Wheat and Tares was irresponsible and dangerous

Ruth Jarman explains how nearly she came to resigning from CEL

When I read Sam Norton’s article in GC74 my first reaction was not to pen this reply. It was to resign immediately from the board of CEL and have nothing more to do with an organisation that prints such dangerous twaddle. I guess I was experiencing what Sam Norton refers to as a Climate Screech.

It’s a free world. People are entitled to think what they like about climate change, to pick the bits of the science that they want to believe and merge them with their favourite lies from the climate denial portfolio. We may all do this to a certain extent – to make life liveable. What I object to is that a lot of what Sam said came across as fact, not, as I think was meant, as something he personally believes in the light of his theology.

Thus a CEL publication, which usually so eloquently showers truth and light on the world, was used to criticise the IPCC and UEA, both of which have been exonerated, and generally to shed doubt on the science of climate change. This is absolutely against our aim as an organisation, “to offer insights into ecology”.

Whether Wheat and Tares is irresponsible and dangerous depends on what the problem is. If the problem is the early on-set of deafness due to too much climate screeching, or the lining of highways with crucified climate deniers, I would probably think the article justified. Our actual problem, however, is that the Earth is heading inexorably towards a climate regime that will not support much of life, particularly what we see as the best bits, and on what our civilisation depends (literate cockroaches will be unperturbed by the item, I expect).

The science is clear. The remedy is also clear. And why are we not implementing the remedy? One big reason is that too many people doubt the science. The natural inclination of us humans is to grab and nurture anything that casts doubt on the science – we simply don’t want to believe it. In 1969, a cigarette executive observed, ‘Doubt is our product, since it is the best means of competing with the ‘body of fact’ that exists in the minds of the general public. It is also the means of establishing a controversy.’ Every article, speech, TV programme that allows people to doubt that things really are as bad as the science is telling us negates many-fold the work of organisations such as CEL and all our hard-working and hard-praying members. Instead, every moment, effort, article, chat must be commandeered to help peopleaccept and act on what the science is telling us.

I did not resign from the board of CEL, partly because this is where my most treasured friends are, and partly so I can ensure that there is better scientific scrutiny of future publications.

References.
2. ‘As Australia burns, attitudes are changing. But is it too late?’ Guardian, 12 January 2013, p.34.
REPORT

The Stream of Life rolls on

CEL members reflect on their annual conference 2013

This was an inspirational and deeply refreshing day – and I wasn't expecting it! I had arrived tired and preoccupied with work and home, and although I was expecting to gain inspiration and knowledge and perhaps materials to take home with me, I did not anticipate that I would feel less tired at the end of the day than at the beginning. The reason was the theme and the teaching.

I was reminded once again that God is much more intimately concerned with His creation than we are – so often it seems that we must come up with the answers, that we must save the planet by our own efforts, and we forget that God has all the answers, and that He has been giving them to His people from time immemorial, if we only take time to listen to Him.

And interspersed with this wise teaching from Philip Roderick was some worship and new ways – new to many of us, although very old – of praying, ‘body prayer’, together with wonderful meditative music brought forth by Philip from the hang drum.

Somehow I was able to ground myself again in the Holy Spirit, to let go of some of the anxiety and panic that fills me when I think of the desperate state of much of our world. Philip reminded us that although we can think of many many good environmental actions to take, we need to be able to listen to God and follow our own particular calling, the calling that God has given us.

The day followed on with inspirational workshops – and, because of my grounding in the morning, I did not feel exhausted and weary about taking on yet more commitments, but rather positive and energised. Things that have seemed so difficult hitherto may not be as difficult as I fear – God is on our side, after all.

Deborah Tomkins

Green Christians can be a rather left-brained lot. We’re quite good at critiques of government policy or corporate greed, and try to get a handle on big numbers and a bit of science. That’s all important, but CEL’s conference on 16 March was a reminder that it’s only the half of it.

80 members gathered in Leeds for a morning with Philip Roderick, Anglican priest and spiritual entrepreneur. Philip has founded several nationwide networks – the Quiet Garden Trust, Contemplative Fire, Hidden Houses of Prayer – all of which in their different ways awaken in people an awareness of connections between themselves, God and the world about them which had previously passed them by. In nearly two hours of shared experience he brought the left-brain in from the cold, with music, gentle percussion, the passionate ecotheology of the early desert writers Isaac of Nineveh and Isaac of Syria, and prayer involving body and mind.

It required a bit of unbuttoning of British reserve, but the effect was empowering and invigorating. The afternoon workshops caught the momentum and helped us channel it for the sake of the world around us. Now I for one feel there is more of me praying and working for life on earth, and more love in that prayer and work, than I knew was possible before.

Paul Bodenham

The Quiet Garden Movement
Quiet Gardens and Quiet spaces
A simply ministry of Hospitality and Prayer

Philip Roderick founded the Quiet Garden Trust twenty years ago. CEL and the QGT willingly partner one another. Some CEL members host Quiet Gardens and CEL can help further the ecological message. Further details from www.quietgarden.org
Democracy needs prophets too

Paul Bodenham reports on CEL’s involvement with the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development

Winston Churchill famously called democracy the worst form of government ‘apart from all the others’ – and many environmentalists would agree. Now it could redeem itself, thanks to a manifesto for democracy and sustainability which CEL helped to shape. It’s an initiative which puts a renewal of democracy at the heart of the green movement, and also challenges the Churches to do the same in their witness for creation.

Democracy hasn’t always been the green activist’s best friend. Haven’t you occasionally caught yourself toy ing with dreams of a benign green dictatorship that would sort it all out? Attractive isn’t it? You understand, I hope, that it would need to be me in charge.

Of course there is no such thing as a sustainable dictatorship. The unpalatable truth is that democratically elected governments do little better, wedded as they are to economic growth, dirty fuel and globalisation, and craven in their homage to the market. They press ever more growth out of our exhausted, debt-ridden economy and degraded planet, in pursuit of the wealth people say they want.

So we have to find a way to make democracy deliver sustainability. That is what the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (FDSD) sets out to do. Last year they consulted on a draft ‘Manifesto for sustainable development’ with groups in 25 countries. CEL had the privilege of being one of these, when 30 members met at St Mary’s Church in Euston in November for a workshop led by Halina Ward and Gabriela Flores from FDSD. Now they and numerous founder signatories have launched the Manifesto as part of the ‘Democracy and Sustainability Platform’ (see box).

But what has it got to do with Christianity? Historically the Church has not exactly been a beacon of democracy. Without in any way intending it, the Manifesto offers Christians an ‘implicit theology’ which will help Churches make new connections between faith, society and the environment – from grassroots community activism, through engagement in national affairs, to international development. It lays to rest the tired dualistic notion of stewardship, in which creation is regarded as an object distinct from humanity to be managed and manipulated. It offers instead a vision of people reconciled with each other through nature, and with nature through each other.

Too often environmental campaigns incite people to make enemies. The culture of blame may be good for the anxious ego, but its effect on society and the soul is corrosive. In the sustainable democracy which the Manifesto maps out there is no room for projected blame. To be a citizen is to love, and through love we become partners in the reign of God, that all-inclusive network of power which, as it dawned on Jesus, is ‘in our midst’.

Imagine a world where democracy drives the economy, not the other way around. Imagine a world where sustainability is at the heart of what governments do, from the local to the global levels. Where gross inequality between people and across countries is consigned to the past. Imagine a world where elected representatives are mandated to take account of future generations, not just people who elect them today. And imagine a world where we, the people, insist that they do so. Imagine a world where, all our lives, the spaces in which we learn and grow teach us that when our basic needs are met, we should value who we are and who we could be, and not what we can get.

For the full text, and to join the Democracy and Sustainability Platform visit: www.democracyandsustainability.org. Make a pledge to try out at least one of the action areas in the Manifesto for Democracy and Sustainability. Share what you learn with CEL.

The six principles of the Manifesto for Democracy and Sustainability:

1. Sustainability needs flourishing democracy
2. Take the long view
3. Sustainability must be a central goal of governments everywhere
4. Education must link citizenship and sustainability
5. Knowledge must be inclusive

For the full text, and to join the Democracy and Sustainability Platform visit: www.democracyandsustainability.org. Make a pledge to try out at least one of the action areas in the Manifesto for Democracy and Sustainability. Share what you learn with CEL.

Respect for human dignity is part of our reverence for creation as a whole; neither is complete without the other. The heyday of the Hebrew prophets was an age of monarchy, but democracy needs its prophets too – people who glimpse the full stature of citizenship and dare to stretch to it, free from compromise and self-interest, and calling others to the same liberation.

As Halina Ward, the manifesto’s facilitator-in-chief, puts it: ‘This isn’t a single-issue campaign. It’s a way of seeing the world and our place within it. It’s a call to create the change that’s needed, together.’ Its vision will not be easily realised, but with this manifesto before us, no longer can it be said that it cannot be done.
Co asmic Justice

Mark Bredin insists that social justice without ecological justice is no justice at all

S ociet y makes it easy for us to take for granted the earth’s resources and to exploit them to satisfy our every whim. Pause for a moment and consider the madness of an economic system that makes it so easy for people to choose to buy plastic bottled water when they have expensively purified water running on tap; further, a system that makes it second nature to flush 30% of that expensively treated drinking water down the loo while one in ten people in the world suffer or are dying for lack of clean water. I think it’s safe to say that the market instils careless and predatory attitudes towards the earth’s resources in us, leading us to care little for the poorest on earth or for the earth itself.

I would like to offer some reflections on the Bible’s teachings about the relationship between social justice and ecological justice. My own position is summed up well by eco-theologian Edward Echlin: ‘Social justice without ecological justice is injustice which ultimately injures people badly.’ Much of this article is a reflection on arguments put forward by ecologists, important as they are, but also on God’s future saving intentions for creation that the Bible reveals. We do well to recall the words of the psalmist:

… you save humans and animals alike, O LORD. (Psalm 36.6)

Visions of Hope

To understand what kind of future Jesus had in mind for creation we must consider the Old Testament. Certain texts within the Old Testament were clearly influential on his vision of creation, the future of creation and what hinders the fulfilment of this future. Isaiah provides the following glimpse:

… I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people. (Isaiah 43.19-20)

Jewish hopes for the future are far from disembodied and human-centred. On the contrary, they anticipate a kingdom where justice reigns for all creation. Similarly we glimpse the future hope for a non-predatory creation, again in Isaiah:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (Isaiah 11.5-7)

The book of Job also looks to such a time:

For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the wild animals shall be at peace with you. (Job 5.23)

The visions we have for the future define our lifestyle choices. It is not accidental that the Bible ends with a vision of a city garden in Revelation 21–22 where God’s just reign benefits all. If we ignore the cosmic-centred visions such as we read above we will err in discerning God’s will and misinterpret Jesus’ teaching. In order to establish God’s reign we must practise cosmic justice and not just social justice. These cosmic visions were inspirational to Jesus as he retired to the wilderness to contemplate God and his creation.

Jesus was also familiar with tradition teaching that human disobedience to God results in the desolation of all creation:

How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who live in it the animals and the birds are swept away, and because people said, ‘He is blind to our ways.’ (Jeremiah 12.4; compare Romans 8.18-23)

Recreation from the wilderness

He was in the wilderness 40 days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. (Mark 1.13)

The first thing Jesus does after his baptism is go to the wilderness. He does not go to the metropolis but to where most humans don’t go. Wendell Berry perceptively comments that the wilderness is a place

… where we must go to be reborn – to receive the awareness, at once humbling and exhilarating, grievous and joyful, that we are part of creation, one with all that we live from and all that, in turn, lives from us.

Through applying Berry’s insights we
can better perceive Jesus’ time in the wilderness. I suggest it is the place where he learns the cosmic virtues necessary to establish God’s reign of peace for all creation: humility, the joy of being part of something bigger than humanity, and a sense of God’s intentions for all creation which human creation is hell-bent on destroying. It is in the wilderness that Jesus begins to put these virtues into practice. Jesus goes to the heart of non-human creation learning that human destiny is tied up with all creation, as we see in the Old Testament texts above.

According to only Mark, Jesus was ‘with the wild beasts’. As he practises cosmic virtues, the result is a vision of harmony even between humans and those that humans most fear: wild beasts. This detail evokes various scholarly interpretations. Probably the most common is to see the beasts as Satan’s representatives. My own view, which has strong scholarly support, is that ‘with the beasts’ means exactly what it says: Jesus is with the beasts in a companionable way, perhaps alluding to the non-predatory future visions in the Old Testament. Jesus would be more akin to Francis of Assisi who is well known for his compassion towards animals and birds. For Francis, social justice was not possible without ecological justice when he writes:

If you have men who will exclude any of God’s creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who deal likewise with their fellow men.

In Mark’s wilderness scene we glimpse at his future vision of all creation being non-predatory and companionable like the Old Testament texts above. In sum, Jesus enters the wilderness to be reborn as a new being ready to show humanity what he has learned – those cosmic virtues God intends humans to learn and practise so that all life may flourish.

Visions of hope for today

Just as Jesus needed visions from his own religious and cultural treasury to inspire and motivate his work, so we need them, today more than ever, as antidotes to human-centred visions of greed that are beamed into our living rooms day after day. I conclude this article by encouraging readers to reflect on the vision of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 22 and 22, contemplating their own place in creation and working out how they can bring about the visions of hope in the Bible that were clearly not limited to humanity. As you do I suggest we be inspired by Barbara Rossing’s summing up of how Revelation 21–22 moves her:

New Jerusalem gives us a vision of a beloved community, a world of abundance for all. This is God’s vision for our whole created world – a world where people of all nations find open gates of welcome, where poor people find water without price, where all find healing … a world that will not be left behind. This is a vision to which we are transported in worship. And this story also transports us back home to see and live God’s vision in our world today.

References
3. All translations are from the NRSV.

Mark Bredin is a freelance theological tutor and writer and has published widely in New Testament studies and ecology. He is author of The Ecology of the New Testament. He lives in King’s Lynn with his wife, Fran, where they attempt to care for their large town garden.
Finding the Still Point
Ross Ashley continues her series on the rediscovery our directions

In the last issue of *Green Christian* winter was drawing in and I was reflecting on the way winter, the cold north, night time, draws us into stillness of the earth which can take us back to our roots, help us become grounded, gathering ourselves in and reflecting on what has gone before, as well as nurturing the seeds of what we may do next. It is also a time to celebrate eldership, experience, wisdom and tradition and to listen to stories.

Time has moved on, spring is here as I write, the birds are lively and loud and there is blossom and growth, summer is waiting round the corner when productivity and energy will be at their height. Creativity and productivity in our lives go through cycles, as do the hours of the day and the seasons of the year which are often linked to the directions of the compass.

The sun moves daily through the sky from east at dawn to sunset in the west. Springtime, linked to the east, brings fresh new growth, summer (south) is the time of flowering, making fruit and growing and autumn (west) brings fulfilment with the gathering in of the fruit and the harvest before winter (north) shuts things down. In the same way our energies change through the day from rest, from incubating ideas, to wakefulness and alertness as they are birthed, through periods of illumination and inspiration, activity, high energy, focus and productivity, then slowing down, evaluating and celebrating and coming back to rest in the dark times of incubation once more.

So, in our days and in our creative processes the time relating to high levels of energy is the south, linked with the sun’s heat, with fire, with the summer, with the middle of the day. In some climates that is the very time to rest, as the heat is so great and everyone stops for siesta. Here, where that natural rhythm does not occur, and we plough on through the middle of the working or creative day, or seasonally find ourselves busier than ever in the summer ‘garden’ when it is both possible and necessary to get everything done, how can we find ways to pause?

We choose of course how often we look for that still point; whether at the height of a creative or productive cycle of work or a project, or part of each day, retreat, each season or all of the above, the elements can help us create rituals to bring structure to the moment. We can create a space or an icon that calls out to us as we pass: in the corner where we put down our keys, near the sink, next to our evening chair, using symbols of the elements as powerful reminders for different times of the day or year.

Fire in the form of a painting, a candle, a colour, can help us remember to give thanks for the energy and creativity, the work we have, as we pause and make sense of it. Lighting a candle, sitting near or around a fire, star-gazing, enjoying the beauty, colour and fragrance of flowers produced by the summer heat, turning our faces to the sun coming through a window, will even for a moment lift our hearts and fill us anew with the energy we need. The sun itself is the bringer of all the energy that flows from plants to animals, that links all living and non-living things and basking in the sun is a celebration of its life-bringing purpose.

The rising and falling of energy is useful and natural. The seventh day rest and our need for daily sleep demonstrate that constant productivity is not how we are meant to operate. To keep on going without pause, without rest, without relief can wear us down and stress us out, we can lose direction and lose our love of what we are doing. Accepting the waxing and waning of energy will release us from the pressure of always doing, always proving our value, to ourselves and others. Pausing and finding the still point is to nourish ourselves and to join in the creative act.

Dr. Ross Ashley is the Centre Director of Ringsfield Hall EcoCentre in Suffolk. The Centre provides programmes for all ages particularly emphasizing reconnection with self, others, the earth and God.
Prophets and Clowns – imagination and resistance in action
a call to consider Non-Violent Direct Action

Truly free for action

I think the biggest challenge CEL members have is to reconcile hope (from which action springs) and honesty (about the prospects of improvement, whether in the international process, human nature or the power of privatising interests). We each have to find a reconciliation between hope and honesty. Mine came from Thomas Merton’s Letter to a Young Activist (see p.16). I commend it to everyone.

His exhortation ‘do not depend on the hope of results’ is sobering. It can look like a betrayal and a surrender. But it’s only when we are free from the outcome that we are truly free for the action. There was a time when I could have been pushed out of optimism into despair. I think what Merton tells us is that beyond both optimism and despair there is a holy place where activists should be – a place of that obedience which is true freedom.

I’m afraid I simply don’t have time left in my diary for new levels of action, but I do have further to go in ‘allowing myself, in the obedience of faith, to be used by God’s love’, and I am sure I always will. That’s what being part of CEL does for me, and the idea of a gathering rooted in mutual support and seeking the Spirit’s guidance appeals to me. We try to make our conferences, retreats and annual members’ meetings such occasions, but I am sure we could do better. Please say how, and I for one will be keen to make it happen.

Paul Bodenham, Chair, CEL

Why the image of the Clown?

The clown is both comedian and critic, at once jester and prophet. The clown’s role is to provide comic relief and critical commentary. What begins as laughter at the clown’s antics often leads to laughter at the human condition itself, with all its absurdity and ambiguity. Still more, a good clown helps us laugh at ourselves. We laugh when the clown falls, trips, receives a cream pie in the face, only to realize that our lives are full of falls, unhappy surprises and totally unexpected moments. We laugh in order not to cry.

The clown is oppressed, incoherent, silly, an object on whom others vent their fury. The clown laughs, as we do, and yet at the very best the clown cries, as do we.

Eugene L. Stockwell, Director Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, in A Community of Clowns, WCC Publications 1987

Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren’t made to serve the Sabbath”.

(Mark 2.28,29 The Message)

When Jesus left the field, he entered the meeting place. There was a man there with a crippled hand. They said to Jesus, “Is it legal to heal on the Sabbath?” They were baiting him. He replied, “Is there a person here who, finding one of your lambs fallen into a ravine, wouldn’t, even though it was the Sabbath, pull it out? Surely kindness to people is as legal as kindness to animals!” Then he said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” He held it out and it was healed. The Pharisees walked out furious, sputtering about how they were going to ruin Jesus.

(Matthew 12.9,14 The Message)
Dear Readers,

Thank you for reading this. The readership of Green Christian, and by that I mean Christian Ecology Link, has become a lifeline to me. I find myself, I expect much like yourselves, living in a society gleefully singing and dancing its way off the edge of a cliff. For those of us trying to dance to a different tune it can be lonely and not a little embarrassing at times.

As such, being able to share with you this burden of concern for the creation we were created to care for is of immeasurable value to me. At the risk of stretching a metaphor I feel like we are the weird kids at the school disco dancing to Thriller while the DJ is playing Hammertime. Hang the DJ indeed. I have just revealed my age perhaps but you can insert your own musical references as you see fit.

This shared burden we carry – this curious blessing that keeps us awake at night and makes us round pegs in square holes at work, rest and play – is the gift given to a prophetic community. I am becoming less averse to describing us as such. As the situation we face worsens it serves no purpose to be coy about our calling.

Although I never got it at first and somebody had to point it out to me, the term ‘Storm of Hope’ that we use to articulate the stil, small voice that will give us no peace until there is peace, is from a poem by Daniel Berrigan, ‘That Intransitive Being’:

Christ, alpha, omega
avatar of hope
whose heart in spite of all
hopes on in spite of us
hopes on for us, in spite of us –
rain, rain on us
untamed, unconstrained
your wildfire storm of hope.

We are greatly inspired, encouraged and challenged by the example of prophets like Daniel Berrigan. He was poet, priest, activist and convict. The last of these categories does not sit well with me and for good reason. Nobody should relish the prospect of incarceration. This notwithstanding, it has been a long time since Christian witness meant Christian martyr to most Christians. We who have been blessed with the knowledge of Jesus Christ will always be grateful to the Church, the kyphotic giant upon whose shoulders we stand. This said, we have inherited a Church and a gospel which is very well adjusted to injustice, yet our faith remains a living faith in a living God who has not changed. He is still the God who would have Isaiah tread Jerusalem naked, the same God who thought it acceptable that Jeremiah would languish in a pit and ultimately the God whose supreme prophetic act led to his Son being nailed to a cross.

I find myself wondering then what is appropriate behaviour for those of us who are both aware of the will of God for creation and also of what is being

1965
‘Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.

‘We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive.

‘Cowardice asks the question, “Is it safe?” Expediency asks the question, “Is it politic?” Vanity asks the question, “Is it popular?” But, conscience asks the question, “Is it right?” And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because one’s conscience tells one that it is right.’

Martin Luther King Jnr

The question we now face is, ‘Does loving as God loves require us to be willing to transgress against the law?’

A few of us in Christian Ecology Link have begun asking this question.

Phil Kingston
Sandra Dutson
Reggie Norton
Rod Thick
Ruth Jarman
George Dow
Westley Ingram
Chris Walton

A few days before his ‘I have a dream speech’
The question for ordinary Christians in this context is done to the beloved of our beloved. Letters we write and marches we march and we change our light bulbs and grow our vegetables and certainly people take some notice. We have an aversion to crossing the line in our activism onto the side of illegality and that seems very commendable. Certainly it is widely commended. However, is it appropriate?

We face the certain destruction of the natural systems that make life on earth recognisable. Our Government doesn't deny this. They cannot. Their own scientists tell it to them. It is our Government's official policy that we are committed to limiting UK carbon dioxide emissions to levels that are consistent with no more than a 2°C rise in temperature. This all sounds like excellent news. Certainly our news media, from the most respectable to the least, are very happy to tell us that every other story in the world is of more concern to us than the eradication of a significant proportion of the lives on this planet. Decisions are influenced by those with no interest in justice and then communicated to us by those with a dulled appetite for the truth. Our society is gripped in a vice of fear and suspicion, crippled by anxiety about the future but fiercely protective of the status quo, the only viable option we are allowed to imagine. When some public display is made to reassure us that the whispers we have heard about the end of the world as we know it are being addressed, the results are hollow and don't stand up to inspection.

In this context I find myself wondering what the appropriate response should be. Since respectability, congeniality and legality guarantees the death of hundreds of millions if not billions of people, is the line of legality drawn by our law-makers an arbitrary barrier? Certainly we are told to submit to those in authority but that was written by a man prone to writing letters from prison. I don't know the answer to this. I know a few of us within Christian Ecology Link have begun asking this question. The question is not 'Is it possible to love as God loves while transgressing against the law of the land?' That question has been answered in the affirmative by Christians all over the world for the last two millennia. The question we now face is 'Does loving as God loves require us to be willing to transgress against the law?'

I take no pleasure in writing this, nor do I enjoy considering it. My Christian testimony has been a series of attempts to live a quiet life, each confounded by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I do not seek out controversy for its own sake and certainly would avoid any arbitrary lawbreaking, but I have to ask, 'Is our society's response to catastrophic climate change deluded enough and the consequences severe enough to make legitimate the inclusion of non-violent direct action in our activism?'

Certainly some of us are having difficulty answering 'no' to that question. If you have a different response to these issues then I would genuinely like to be convinced by you. If you also feel that what we now face makes legitimate non-violent direct action, please contact us so we can prayerfully support each other in this.

Yours
Westley Ingram
westley.ingram@gmail.com

NVDA 2013
We cannot escape the truth of climate change, and so we shrug our shoulders, preferring to accept various facts: entire ecosystems have died ... As Christians, we are required to do more than accept the problems we create. We are challenged to repent. And repentance should be more than saying sorry. It requires a change of both heart and action.

Our repentance must be loud, and it must be visible, if we are to act as an example, and to suggest a way out of the complacency into which our society has sunk.........

Quiet regret is not enough. We must assert our repentance for the misuse of creation. We need to unite our voices. If we could have the courage to challenge the status quo and all it represents, then we could force the Government to count the physical presence of our non-violent direct action.

Tamsin Omond

If you are interested get in touch: georgedow51@btinternet.com

Tamsin Omond, author, journalist and founding member of the direct action group Climate Rush.
Grandparents occupy Barclays Bank

Grandparents for a Safe Earth care deeply about the world our grandchildren will inherit. We call on Barclays Bank to disinvest from coal infrastructure and radically to increase investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

On 6 March, members of the group made a protest inside Barclays Bank, Whiteladies Road, Bristol. They displayed posters, offered leaflets and asked for the support of staff and customers in pressing for Barclays to disinvest from coal. Photographs of grandchildren helped draw attention to their reasons for action.

The group is focussing on Barclays because the bank is the UK's largest investor in worldwide coal infrastructure and therefore a major contributor to climate change (www.banktrack.org). The group believes that current energy policy, financed heavily by Barclays, puts their grandchildren's future at risk.

CEL member and founder member of Grandparents for a Safe Earth, Phil Kingston writes:

I don’t rush to put myself in a position where I break the law and could get arrested so last Wednesday’s action came after a lot of thought and prayer. Like each of you who has children, I have been increasingly concerned about the kind of earth that our children and grandchildren will inherit. For a number of years I have plugged away at engaging politicians, business and media about the seriousness and urgency of this. I think many of them already know at a head level but are frightened to speak because they either don’t know what to do or are concerned about the enormity of trying to manage society’s responses, and maybe the magnitude of the changes to their own philosophies. I am disappointed and disturbed by their responses, though those words often don’t do justice to what I feel, which is sometimes more despair. Well, despair is a useful pathway to re-finding hope, hope in God and the human spirit and in the love which we have for our children and grandchildren; and for all of those unborn who aren’t yet even a twinkle in their parents’ eyes!

The reason we took the action we did is stated in the extract from the press release which is on the Bristol Indymedia website below.

After going into the bank we gave the manager a letter which explained what we intended to do and why. It included this statement:

’We are grandparents who come here with peace and goodwill in our hearts. This reflects both the kind of earth which we want our grandchildren to inherit and our wish to connect with the longing for peace and goodwill which we believe resides in all human hearts. Our actions today will be peaceful and our intention is to cause no damage or injury.’

That advice from Thomas Merton...

Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on, essentially an apostolic work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. …The big results are not in your hands or mine, but they suddenly happen, and we can share in them, but there is no point in building our lives on this personal satisfaction, which may be denied us and which after all is not that important….All the good that you will do will come, not from you but from the fact that you have allowed yourself, in the obedience of faith, to be used by God’s love. Think of this more and gradually you will be free from the need to prove yourself, and you can be more open to the power that will work through you without your knowing it. … If you can get free from the domination of causes and just serve Christ’s truth, you will be able to do more and will be less crushed by the inevitable disappointments. Because I see nothing whatever in sight but much disappointment, frustration, and confusion. … The real hope, then, is not in something we think we can do, but in God who is making something good out of it in some way we cannot see.
Over the past few months CEL has been active in several areas:

- Westley Ingram, Ruth Jarman and others carried the CEL banner in support of the biofuelwatch in their demonstration at the DRAX AGM in London. DRAX plans to convert its coal facility to dual-fuel, burning biomass imported from abroad. Although assurances have been given that this will be from sustainable sources, current plans for converting power stations to biomass will require many times more wood than is grown by this country every year.

- Judith Allinson sent out a European Churches Environmental Network Churchyard Survey to members who requested it. Call the CEL office if you would like to complete a survey of your own churchyard.

- We signed up to the call for action in support of the Global Day of Action on Military Spending which calls for military spending to be shifted towards social and environmental needs. Pax Christi is one of the initiators of this project which was marked for the first time in the UK this April.

- We distributed thousands of extra copies of our Storm of Hope brochure to be handed out by CEL members in their own churches. Call the CEL office if you want some extra copies for your own Church 0845 459 8460.

Members of CEL’s ecocell discipleship community were joined by new friends last January for the ecocell transport seminar: From A to B? Or Making A a good place to Be? The title of the day spoke volumes as we spent time considered how we travel, why we travel and what it means for us to stay put.

How we got here

Tony Emerson, joint co-ordinator of ecocell 2 gave an overview of our current position. First of all we took a “Cook’s Tour” of the last century’s developing relationship between personal motoring and town planning and the corresponding trends in emissions. Those of us committed to living lives that are responsible in terms of emissions of CO2 and everything else have a long way to go. The ecocell community usually concentrates on our personal lifestyle choices and their impact on our co-creation but the choices we make are limited to the choices available to us in the place we live. Today we would be considering what it means for a community to be sustainable in terms of transport and travel.

Where are we

The new joint co-co-ordinator of ecocell, George Dow, reflected on what it means to live in a place. Our willingness to curtail our travel, to travel more slowly and more deliberately derives from our ability to find meaning and purpose in the place we find ourselves. George reflected on the place he lives in now, and how he came to accept his place in it and then to see the potential in the place. Staying put allowed him to find places of beauty and people of peace who he had not seen before.

Car-free communities

Steve Melia, Senior Lecturer in transport planning at the University of the West of England in Bristol spoke to us about his research into car-free communities, concentrating upon the examples of good practice from Freiberg, Groningen and Lyon. It seems that Britain leads Europe in our reliance upon the car.

Nevertheless reliance upon the car is common throughout Europe and even where car use is discouraged within large cities Europe’s system of motorways means that intercity driving is on the rise.

The examples given were very interesting, showing how it was possible for a city to move away from car use over a period of decades of consistent town planning. Steve’s research revealed a lot of challenging facts also. When people are asked what needs to be done to encourage people out of their cars they usually say ‘better public transport’ but he showed that...
cities that invest in improved public transport do not necessarily significantly reduce car use. Usually new and improved public transport provision mainly leads to new trips or people switching from existing modes of public transport with only small levels of transfer from the car. He cited one interesting example of free public transport for the young in Holland having the primary effect of reducing cycling. Ultimately it is important to disincentivise car use while making public transport easier. This will not only make for more liveable communities but will also increase resilience in the event of resource shortages to come.

Westley Ingram

Steering Committee Nominations

This time each year we refresh the membership of CEL’s steering committee with a call for nominations. This year the deadline is 6 July. If you would like to consider becoming part of our national committee please email Barbara Echlin (CEL Secretary) secretaty@christianecology.org.uk or call Paul Bodenham (CEL Chair) on 01949 861516 for more information on what is involved and how to put yourself forward.

CEL has agreed to be one of the signatories of the Lausanne Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel

The prophet Joel challenged the people of his time: ‘Listen, all you who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? Tell it to your children…’Joel 1:2. The land had been devastated by locusts; now we are facing an unprecedented ecological crisis that demands the kind of whole-hearted response that Joel called for, but this time from the worldwide Church.

In 2010 the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization issued ‘The Cape Town Commitment’ which recognised that ‘The Bible declares God’s redemptive purpose for creation. Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out the biblical truth that the gospel is God’s good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, and for society, and for creation.’ This led to a commitment to ‘urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility.’

One outcome of this was the gathering of over 50 people from 26 nations last October at the Lausanne Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel. Our prayers, discussions and worship grew out of the themes of God’s world, God’s Word and God’s Work. Voices were heard from many different contexts including the urban poor in Brazil, Haiti and the Congo; those engaged in forestry work in Ghana and Burundi, and in conservation work in India; and from pastors, scientists, mission leaders, theologians and educators. Presentations and interest groups explored issues such as missions and the gospel, food security, communications and sustainable cities. We were led to two primary conclusions: that creation care is indeed a ‘gospel issue within the lordship of Christ’; and that we are faced with a crisis that is pressing and urgent and that must be resolved within our generation. Do pray with the consultation participants for fruitful outcomes, including:

1. A whole-hearted response to the consultation’s Call to Action,
2. A global creation care movement of scientists, theologians and practitioners, with regional planning groups to encourage appropriate responses in different parts of the world,
3. Creation care will be embraced by all Christians in their understanding and practice of mission.

So please read the Call to Action and prayerfully consider how to respond:

• Should you enter a covenant with your family, fellowship group or Church to encourage significant changes towards a simpler lifestyle?
• How can the whole Church be mobilised to contribute to modelling and advocating a more sustainable way of life?
• How can you engage students and other visitors from overseas to contribute to an exploration of what a sustainable way of life will involve in different contexts, and its implications for trade etc? How can you foster creative links and partnerships between Churches and fellowship groups here and across the world?
• So many of the impacts of our way of life are ‘below the horizon’ – what can you do to research and share such information, and to contribute to remedial action?
• How can you pray for, support and encourage those involved in creation care as an integral part of mission? How can you mobilise others to join in this work?

For more information about the Lausanne Movement http://www.lausanne.org/en/about.htm

New Members

Kathy Barton (Lancs)
Gordon & Lynne Blair (Lancs)
Alison Duckers (Notts)
Peter Grimwood (Worcester)
Ralph Hindle (Avon)
Michael Howitt (London)
Michael Milton (Kent)
Rev Andrew Norman (Surrey)
Simon Ross (Shropshire)
Anthony & Eline Smith (Yorkshire)
Sylvia Walker (West Yorks)
Diocese of Gloucester (Dr Simon Topping)
Merrilyn Sawrey-Cookson (Cumbria)
Richard Griffiths (Surrey)

Please notify the CEL office if you move or change your email or telephone number – and ask for a Membership Response Form to fill in if you haven’t already sent one to us.
Desolation and restoration, lament and hope, shadows and shafts of sun: familiar conflicts to all of us who struggle with this degraded world. And conflicts familiar also to Jeremiah. His early prophecies are doom-laden ‘I will weep and wail for the mountains’ (9.10), although these too are shot through with glimmers of hope, as in Jeremiah 23. Then in Jeremiah 29, the tenor alters, the balance shifts and reverses. Still we hear of punishment and storm, still the city will be besieged, but there will be joy and gladness for God’s followers, and He will ‘plant them in this land in faithfulness’ (32.41).

As light and shade interweave in our own consciousness, so I see this mirrored within CEL local groups, as several groups, whether long-running or recent, struggle and close, while new ones open. A new CEL group has formed in King’s Lynn, and the first weekend in July will see their inaugural event, an Open Weekend to celebrate creation and display members’ sustainable lifestyles. They would be glad to see you there.

In their walk all of CEL’s local groups seek to interweave the dual threads of faith and ecology, in diverse ways. Andover CEL recently enjoyed a bring and share supper preceded by a bring and share liturgy, when members could request a specific song, piece of music, prayer or poem and explain why this inspires them. The Norfolk DEO intends to draw on the writings of Matthew Fox, an eco-theologian in the USA, to inspire others with Fox’s very positive theology of creation. Churches Together in Leighton Buzzard have followed an environmental study course assembled by the CEL group leader from ecocell and like programmes. The St Ives group will hear Hilary Marlow preach at the Free United Reform Church. Hereford CEL recently met to discuss the 2013 Storm of Hope issue, while on another occasion they heard a talk with slides on the Nature of Herefordshire. The Clun Group has maintained their link with Sustainable Futures, with talks on organic farming and on the work of Natural England to maintain the flora and fauna of the Stiperstones.

Reawakening the awareness of the natural world we are losing in the face of the demands of the 24/7 media output is crucial. The Clun group will tour an organic farm this spring. Leighton Buzzard CEL is also planning an outing to an organic farm. Members of the other CEL group in Bedfordshire, Clifton, went to Welwyn Garden City’s Peace Garden: an unused space behind a chu ch now planted with hundreds of bulbs and many species of plants and drawing the community together.

Once again, groups also seek to interweave political activities and an individual response. Cheltenham CEL held an event in February at which the local MP was quizzed about the Government’s new Energy Bill. In May they will hear from Tom Cullinan, a Catholic priest, about ‘A Year of Food and Faith’, cross-referencing Pope Benedict XVI’s year of Faith with the IF Campaign against global hunger. This campaign will be central this year and members of Reading CEL lobbied their MP alongside other local campaigners in March. The IF Campaign was one
issue covered by the first issue of a new quarterly magazine which the Wallington group has decided to produce. Entitled New Leaf, the magazine will be sent to 18 local Churches. Perhaps an idea other groups might follow?

Petersfield CEL still supports the Greening Movement which in March held a talk by Lord Stern on the environmental situation since the Stern report in 2006. The Milton Keynes group heard a Green Party politician discuss the party’s policies and also hosted a talk about the United Sustainable Energy Agency.

At the individual/group level, children in Clifton have enjoyed planting bulbs in the churchyard, and craft sessions, glass-painting and making cards. In Shrewsbury the Ecumenical Green Group has responded to the Rubbish Diet Initiative with a Slim Your Bin challenge. The group’s contact’s street has become the first street in England to implement the challenge to cut waste down to 10kg, or even 3kg a fortnight, when the national average stands at 26kg (see the box alongside).

The Wallington group has decided to embark on ecocell 2 interspersed with reflective sessions on faith and nature. Ottery St Mary will once more run their biannual environment event in their church in early October, with activities for children outside and a programme of talks inside.

As Jeremiah’s prophecies progress, the time shifts once again, darkness redescends. Many nations will be uprooted, ‘joy and gladness ... gone from the orchards and fields of Moab’ (Jeremiah 8.33). As there, so here, phosphorescence fades away. Months go by before the new hedge grows. And dark clouds gather once more over my garden.

Jeremiah’s hope and lament still sound. When we return to God and truly repent our faithfulness (3.22), then God assures us, ‘your wounds I will heal’ (30.17). I will close there with the shadows aside, but as in Jeremiah, the struggle goes on, as each day closes in mid-sentence. Will we walk the way of desolation or the way of restoration? ■

Send in the Clowns

Send in the Clowns is a song by Stephen Sondheim from the 1973 musical A Little Night Music, an adaptation of Ingmar Bergman’s film Smiles of a Summer Night. It is a ballad from Act II in which the character Desirée reflects on the ironies and disappointments of her love life. The refrain keeps asking, ‘Where are the clowns?’ and ‘Where are the Clowns?/There ought to be clowns’ and again ‘Where are the Clowns?/Don’t bother they’re here’.

The use of the image of the clown in the song refers to the two lovers. They had got it wrong; botched it up. They were both vulnerable, sad and wondering if there was any hope of ever getting it right. There was no need to send in the clowns to make them laugh and recover their self-esteem and their love. After all they themselves were the clowns, the ones with the resilience to carry on despite the set backs, in spite of the mistakes to live with hope and finally to reach their goal.

The Rubbish Diet Challenge.

Can the average person really create zero waste? Karen Cannard a mother from Bury St Edmunds gave it a go in 2008. By the end of an eight week trial she threw away only one plaster!

Now five years on the Rubbish Diet is about to be launched across the counties of Suffolk and Shropshire. It has made it through to the finals of a major national waste reduction challenge. Over the next six months each county needs to have brought 100 households on board.

The idea is to monitor your bin, taking photographs and/or weighing your bin during an eight week period. This will help track progress and by comparing with others, encourage exchanging hints and advice.

Every week challenges are set such as: finding what and where items can be recycled, shopping with waste in mind. We look at trying to reduce food waste and composting more, all the time working towards zero waste.

See www.therubbishdiet.co.uk for more details.

Here in Shropshire we did a trial with 15 households at the end of 2012. This showed the potential of the concept and following this pilot a member of Shrewsbury Ecumenical Green Group, Howard Hutchings has helped launch it in his street, the first in the country to do so. 15 households are working together to slim their bins.

All recyclable items that cannot go into the fortnightly kerbside collection are put into dumpy bags situated outside one of the households taking part. This household then takes these items to one of the county’s recycling centres. This means that one vehicle is taking recycled goods to the centre saving 14 journeys from the street. A different household carries out this task two weeks later.

Initial results have been astounding with most families reducing their waste by a third and one family by 20kg! The Rubbish Diet really works – bins get slimmer and working together makes it a fun and rewarding process.

If you or your Church or your street would like to slim your bins or if you would like more information please contact Alison Thomas on 07972 858313 or alison.thomas08@gmail.com. Or Howard Hutchings. hhutchings@talktalk.net
Fukushima:
The Death Knell for Nuclear Energy?
By Sean McDonagh July 2012 Columba Press

This is a clear exposition of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, its antecedents and its continuing aftermath. McDonagh compares the nuclear craze to the ancient myth of Poseidon stealing fire from the gods. Nuclear energy was first discovered by the French physicist Henri Becquerel in 1896. But the real history of the development of nuclear energy and power is in the 20th century, the quest for military uses culminating in the Nagasaki and Hiroshima disasters, but still continuing as deterrence, as in Israel and North Korea, and the UK.

McDonagh documents the horrendous dangers of nuclear power, including the near impossibility of decommissioning plants and storing spent fuels safely and avoiding accidents from natural disasters, such as occurred at Fukushima. Almost immediately after the catastrophe, radiation was found in air, soil, water and fish within a large radius. Shockingly in April 2011 the Japanese government released 11,500 tons of contaminated water into the seas. Like Chernobyl, Fukushima is now within the deep earth, endangering earth life including humans.

McDonagh notes that spent uranium and other saturated materials must be segregated and stored for 200,000 years, a span roughly comparable to the years since our species first appeared in Africa. McDonagh has done impressive research, including the writings of Dr Helen Caldecott, New Economics Foundation, NGOs and contemporary journals, including the Guardian and New Scientist. McDonagh chronicles other disasters such as Windscale, Three Mile Island, and Chernobyl, and warnings about other potential, and even beginning, disasters such as Sellafield, Hinkley Point, Hartlepool and Dungeness. In all accidents and credible warnings there is a subsequent cover-up by the nuclear lobby including industry, government and media.

No Oil in the Lamp: Fuel, Faith and the Energy Crisis
By Andy Mellen and Neil Hollow
August 2012
Darton, Longman and Todd

Andy Mellen owns a smallholding and has written on ecological issues for ThirdWay magazine. Neil Hollow has a doctorate in Environmental Biotechnology and concerns about peak oil.

The first thing that made me sit up was the review that read, 'Neil and Andy have set out the background to the issue of Peak Oil and exposed some of the consequences of an energy-constrained future', this by the Chief Executive of Scottish and Southern Energy! The 13 chapters cover the problem and the Christian attitude to it. The conventional energy sources – coal, gas and nuclear – are considered in detail and some of the moral issues facing Christians from use of these are discussed. There are two chapters about alternative energy, renewable electricity and renewable heat and transport, and a look at the neglected area of the relationship between oil, food and chemicals. The economic market system is explored, as are some of the alternative models compatible with a life after Peak Oil from a Christian viewpoint. The consequences of carrying on in our present way are debated; the Transition Movement is discussed as is the way the Bible relates to the present situation in terms of the lessons and instructions within.

The final three chapters cover what we as individual can do, what the Church locally and nationally can do, explaining what some local Churches have done and, in conclusion, where we go from here. There is also a very useful short glossary and study guide.

I read the whole book in just one and a bit readings; I could simply not put it down. Easy to read, full of facts, some quite frightening, very well referenced indeed, and quite inspirational. As far as Peak Oil is concerned the world is sleepwalking into a bleak future unless facts are faced. The authors of this book face those facts in easy-to-read detail and show that there really is a way forward if action is taken.

Revd Peter Doodes
Between God & Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change

By Katherine K Wilkinson
July 2012
Oxford University Press
256 pages
RRP £18.99

This book is based on research carried out in the USA during 2007 to 2009 by a consultant to the Boston Consulting Group who has also taught environmental science at Oxford University. It provides a wealth of material and some deep insights and is written in a clear but inevitably somewhat academic style.

The research included interviews with both leaders and ordinary members of evangelical Churches. It is estimated that evangelicals account for 25-30% of the US population so for those who are concerned with effective action on climate change they are a vital group.

In the USA the term “evangelical” is often taken to imply people who are deeply sceptical of the science of climate change and of the need to tackle it. The author met many such people and this perhaps still represents the majority of people in evangelical Churches. But among the leadership there are now many who see this as a major issue that Christians are called on to address urgently.

The author’s summary of how and why these widely divergent positions exist was very enlightening to this reviewer, who is not an evangelical. Although much of what she writes applies particularly to the USA, for example the links between the right wing of the Republican Party and right-wing evangelicals, many of the insights would be helpful for understanding people of similar views in the UK.

What is particularly fascinating is the description of the growth of a movement which encouraged evangelicals to address climate change. To even mention this was like a red rag to a bull and the patient, courageous work of a number of Church leaders is inspiring. Also notable is the help they received from Sir John Houghton who is great supporter of CEL.

The ‘middle ground’ to which the author refers still seems to be somewhat elusive. Perhaps the area where this is most likely to develop is in the increasingly broad acceptance of ‘creation care’ and care of neighbour as being essential elements of a Bible-based Christianity. The author quotes several testimonies of people who moved via this area to subsequent acceptance of the centrality of climate change.

The environmental movement worldwide has to accept that to a great extent it appears to have failed to capture the hearts and minds of people or to energise them to take action. The book suggests that religion, with its focus on ethical values, has an important contribution in motivating people and the author maintains that a link between secular and religious environmentalists is both possible and essential if the necessary action is to occur. It will be a long road ahead. As one of the major evangelical leaders in the USA puts it: ‘right now … we’re kind of wandering in the wilderness, but we’re making for the promised land’.

Mike Monaghan

Sharing Eden: Green Teachings from Jews, Christians and Muslims

By Nathan Levy, David Shreeve and Harfiyah Haleem
June 2012
Kube Publishing Ltd
106 pages
ISBN 978-1-8477-4041-0
RRP £4.99

Sharing Eden represents an important initiative between the Muslim, Jewish and Christian traditions. It attempts to bring together resources, theological ideas and religious insights from each tradition in order to show the reader that addressing the ecological crisis is an opportunity for the human community to come together in dialogue and in love.

Each section includes a short summary of how Jews, Muslims and Christians approach issues such as sustainability and waste; water; energy and natural resources; climate change; food; and biodiversity and regeneration. The reader is guided carefully through clear and accurate presentations of how the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities are seeking to address a plethora of ecological concerns. It might be said, however, that the more advanced reader would hope for a more sustained and critical analysis of some of the topics and, perhaps, of how the ecological crisis presents us with an opportunity for genuine inter-religious dialogue.

Nevertheless, those who have yet to acknowledge that there is, in fact, an ecological crisis, or admit that faith traditions contain rich resources which can sustain the quest for solutions, will be greatly inspired by the writings contained within this short book. The illustrations assist in giving the reader visual stimuli that encourage them to look at creation differently and subsequently to attempt to change their vision concerning how it ought to be regarded.

The potential of this book lies in the fact that it brings faiths together in a way that avoids the temptation of expecting anyone to abandon their tradition, or to presume their tradition is more ecologically advanced or sophisticated than the others, but rather to show that the ecological crisis is one which is shared by the entire human family.

Therefore, it makes sense to use such ecological discussion as an opportunity for dialogue and to share the rich resources contained within each tradition. We may then come to a greater understanding of how we should behave in relation to the created order and move towards the various contexts within which this might be done.

One hopes that the authors of this short book will consider collaborating once again to produce a fuller and perhaps more sophisticated volume in the not too distant future, as this is important work indeed.

Ann Marie Mealey
Cosmic Prayer and Guided Transformation: Key Elements of the Emergent Christian Cosmology

By Robert Govaerts
August 2012
Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick
226 pages
RRP £24.99 (paperback), £17.90 (ebook)

Govaerts presents a Christian cosmological vision for all creation which envisages humanity in a process of transformation towards what God intends, exemplified uniquely in Jesus: care and desire for justice for all creation.

Govaerts elucidates this vision in dialogue with Scripture, Hellenistic thinking, traditional Christian theology – particularly Maximus the Confessor (580–662) – and process and new theology, as well as scientific understandings of evolution.

Govaerts emphasises personal transformation through prayer and divine guidance by which we develop virtues fitting into Govaerts’ contemplative/prayer-centred vision. Christians might offer her respite so she can go out with some friends for an hour and thus in some way facilitate more intimate community.

The doctrine of the Trinity is important to Govaerts and is characterised by God’s self-giving, suffering, love and compassion. This theory of the Trinity, with its emphasis on God as loving community, is popular among many Christians concerned with both social and ecological justice. This discussion provides a helpful overview of scholarly views such as those of Molmann and Fiddes.

It is argued that creation is in continuous process. All creation longs for communion with the Holy Trinity and for personalisation within the Trinity (p.134). Through this longing for God, creation is being guided by God to be at one with his will (p.150). This view rejects a deterministic view of creation as well as views of creation as finished or that God is micromanaging creation. Indeed, creation as in process is part of God’s creative intention and this provides a reason for Christians being involved in the world through living obediently in such a way as to facilitate what God intends.

This book challenges the notion of humankind’s distinctiveness as rooted in its rational abilities (p.99). Hierarchy is often based on rational abilities and dominates our attitudes towards creation, leading to those in the upper echelons domineering over all others. A key symptom of this hierarchy is the encouragement of self-empowerment among individuals. This perspective leads to inequality and increasing suffering for many others.

Govaerts rightly argues that humans are to be defined by their capacity for a communal life rooted in God’s nature as community and culture based in prayer, care, love and joyfulness.

In summary, this book is not an easy read and I wonder whether Govaerts could have made his argument more palatable by limiting his scope to fewer disciplines. It strikes me, for example, that Scripture alone would have amply supported his argument, albeit without the developed Trinitarian ideas. But this is still a valuable presentation of a Christian cosmological vision that can indeed motivate many of us to seek justice for all creation and a very useful resource for anyone dealing with Trinity or Maximus the Confessor.

Mark Bredin

Faith and the Future of the Countryside

Edited by Jill Hopkinson and Alan Smith
March 2012
Canterbury Press, Norwich
144 pages
RRP £24.99 (paperback), £17.90 (ebook)

The book Faith and the Future of the Countryside draws together the work of 12 excellent rural theorists and practitioners and is an interesting mix of business, social, ecological, spiritual and pastoral concerns.

Several chapters stress the importance of the one million rural businesses in the UK. The business which receives most attention, apart from farming, is tourism, and there is a plea that Churches should work much more in partnership with secular agencies like tourist boards, but also that those secular agencies should take more account of the Churches.

There is considerable emphasis on rural poverty, which, it is claimed, has been largely ignored by successive governments. While there has recently been some government concern about the desperate need for more social housing, the recent cuts have set that back. The needs of the elderly and the mentally ill are considered, and one chapter raised the issue of reclaiming the land for the people, known as food sovereignty, though the author admits that vested interests would make that well nigh impossible at present.

There is a connection between the business and the ecological in that it is said that a low-carbon economy would greatly benefit rural areas and there is stress on the proximity principle in regards to local trading and that peasant farmers are ‘the last line of resistance to the global corporate takeover of the food chain’ (Echlin, quoting from Julian Rose). There is satisfaction that at least there is some hope of a sensible policy about our woods, which are so vital to combating climate change.

Also, ‘woods draw humanity to see the divine in the ordinary’, and there are admonitions to Churches to take more account of people’s spiritual yearnings, which can often lead them to being inspired by church buildings, provided they are open, and to enjoying the peace that such rural areas as forests provide.

There is much in the book about the need for Churches to encourage the continued on page 24
formation of resilient communities and the book ends with a delightful tale of how the sensitive use of three occasional offices in a small village, which would have been written off by many as having no vibrant Christian life, completely transformed the community and brought into the Kingdom surprising people in ones and twos.

However, there is one very important element missing. Professor Leslie Francis brought out a book in 1985 called Rural Anglicanism, subtitled A future for young Christians? He traced the way rural Churches had turned from looking after young people to looking after ancient buildings. The cover of Faith and the Future shows children exiting a church building, but in the introduction it is stated that it was decided to leave out any mention of young people. It looks as if Francis’ question mark has not gone away.

Tony Hodgson

CEL Annual Retreat 2013 is to be held at Ringsfield Hall in Suffolk on the weekend of 18-20 October

Using Ringsfield’s experience of enabling children to reconnect with the natural world, we will enjoy a primarily outdoor retreat following and reconstructing some of their activities, from demonstrating interconnection to the favourite activity for very many of the children who visit, namely times of solitude. We will discover how the children really do lead us and how we can engage in making our own meaning.

Come and enjoy CEL community in retreat together with all the space, quiet and good food at Ringsfield.

To book contact Chris on 07881 941296 or e-mail GreenEditor@aol.com or write to Chris Walton Ringsfield Hall, Beccles, Suffolk NR34 8JR.
Flight Behaviour
By Barbara Kingsolver
Faber and Faber 2012
UK price £18.99
416 pages
This is a novel about global warming. If you enjoyed Barbara Kingsolver’s other novels such as The Poisonwood Bible or The Lacuna you will enjoy this. The story is set in a farming community in Tennessee, a community in which a Christian congregation of a conservative evangelical character plays an important part in setting the scene and determining the responses of the characters to what occurs.
So what does occur? The novel concerns the migratory behaviour of the monarch butterfly, swarms of which suddenly arrive on the farm of the heroine’s family contrary to its normal pattern of life. Why is this happening? Why are these hosts of orange butterflies so wildly off course and why have they arrived at this particular place at this particular time? What are the consequences of this strange phenomenon for the characters, the country and the butterflies themselves? How is this event to be understood by the scientists, the Church and its preacher and the family on whose land the insects have settled?
As she comes from a farming community of this kind herself and has degrees in biology, this is a story that the author is well qualified to write. The best aspect of the story is the description of the interaction between the heroine, Delarobia, and the scientists who come to her farm to study the monarch butterflies. The least satisfactory aspect is the somewhat clunky way in which the hard science is introduced into the story line. Another difficulty for me is that much of the dialogue is written in Appalachian slang which adds to the verisimilitude but offers a challenge to the English reader.
Delarobia’s life and that of her family is transformed by the coming of the butterflies, the scientists who study them and the media who are looking for a good story. The butterflies offer her a way of escape from a loveless marriage, a constraining social existence and into the world of science. Hence the title of the novel Flight Behaviour.
This novel would be a useful text for a Christian reading group whose members share an interest in justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It offers an engaging way of addressing the issue of global warming and climate change and introduces the reader to some of the political, scientific and moral issues that need to be resolved if we are to make any progress towards a wise response to this critical issue which is so fundamental for all our futures.
Let’s hope the book is soon published in paperback and made into a film. Such a treatment would be of great benefit to the environmental cause.

Peter Grimwood

Methodist Relief and Development Fund
The Iota Course
This is a small group resource a free 8-, 10- and 14-session course to help Christians understand the issues behind global injustice and how they can take action. The Leader’s booklet includes a CD.
Iota includes:
Introductory session on Think Global: who is my neighbour?
Session on A Changing Climate.
Session on myths and preconceptions we sometimes have regarding international development/aid.
15 short films, interactive exercises and games, Bible studies, discussions, quizzes and action points.
Available from The Methodist Church, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR 020 7467 5132 mrdf@methodistchurch.org.uk

Stations of the Forest
A Columban Mission Education Programme
This DVD and 32 page Resource Booklet uses the ‘Stations of the Cross’ format to lament the stages in the death of a part of God’s creation, the rainforests.
The programme visits the 14 Stations of the Cross as stations of the forest, providing Bible readings, facts and figures and discussion questions.
Originally produced in the 1980s this is a revised production incorporating global issues to rainforest destruction such as the extractive industries and climate change.
“The earth is precious to God and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator”
Chief Seattle’s Testimony
For further information:
www.columbans.co.uk and jpicssc@btconnect.com

Hope for Planet Earth
A Christian Response to Climate Change
Produced by Tear Fund and A Rocha
This DVD features four professional multi-media presentations guiding you through the science of Climate Change, dispelling the myths; exploring our impact on the planet; the moral imperative surrounding the world’s poor; and the Biblical perspective.
Featuring:
Sir John Houghton
Dr Martin Hodson
Rev. Dave Bookless
Alisha Sanvicens
Andy Frost
For further information: www.hopeforplanetearth.co.uk
Dear Editor

I am off again!

I am listening to the Radio 4 programme with Melvyn Brag, about the Value of Culture. It is very interesting and is talking about the way Edward Tyler coined the word ‘anthropology’ and the phrases ‘primitive culture’. The German Protestant Quakers used the word ‘culture’ but he included the word ‘civilisation’ as well.

It reminds me of a thought I had that in our modern world we need to think about LIFE STYLES. The western world is now a function of life styles in our consumerist culture. We do not have class any more; we are divided by the levels of our life styles. Our financial wealth governs our life styles and the pressure to go up the life style levels forces many into debt.

We need to start to look at this and grade life styles so we can work at leveling life styles so we can fairly reduce our impact on our earth.

Have you ever had any thoughts about this?

Barbara Mark

Dear Editor

On the 21st October 2012 I attended a CAFOD Potato Day at Noddfa Retreat House. While I was there Christian Ecology Link was staying there. This was an excellent opportunity for me to learn about this organisation. I wasn’t aware of the group beforehand and felt that the talk they gave us was very inspiring. As a young person myself I felt it was interesting to learn about the group and the environment around us. I feel we have a responsibility to keep God’s creation and to respect it. It is only after returning that I began to look around me with clear eyes and see the beauty of his surroundings – this time he slowly began to appreciate this.

And so there we were – Jacqueline and me – rowing up and down this river – in the late afternoon sunshine, with the shade and light reflecting on the leaves of the overhanging branches and the surface of the water. On the opposite bank was Wilderness Island, a haven of informal tangles of plants – trees and wildflowers – which no doubt is the home to teeming wildlife.

And it struck me that these local riches are freely available to us all. As many readers will know, we have some lovely green spaces in this borough, with more than 94 miles along its 11-mile length. In 1086, the Domesday Book noted 13 mills. By the time the lie of the land, the shape of places and so on.

I can very much empathise with this experience. Before we left to set up home in Yorkshire seven years ago I had felt little connection with this physical place, considering it very much an anonymous outer London borough – convenient for commuting but lacking in beauty. And it was only after returning that I began to look around me with clear eyes and see the places which I had previously passed by unnoticed.

Perhaps there is something in this for other folk too. Rather than ‘escaping’ our towns for faraway places, it may be an interesting and surprising experience to ‘have a holiday at home’. To go deeper into the place – the land and – yes – many of the buildings which have been constructed so well and which may have a fascinating history.

And of course this is God’s place – just as much as some far-off, more glamorous holiday resort. In Colossians Ch 1 verses 16 - 17, Paul writes: ‘By him all things were created’ and ‘In him all things hold together’. God’s creation is everywhere – ‘having a holiday at home’. To go deeper into the place – the land and – yes – many of the buildings which have been constructed so well and which may have a fascinating history.

So how about for your next holiday, try an adventure trip around your local landscape – remember your heritage, glory in your surroundings within a few miles radius of your home ... and think of how much you save in terms of money, stress ... and carbon emissions!

George Dow

Amy Davies
Thomas has a warning for us. Even a slow God can be a delusion. Any God who is ‘plain and out there’ will give us a wild goose chase.

So it is with salvation history. In the beginning the people heard God say ‘Go’, and they went. Seeking their destiny, they roamed far and wide, throughout the Near East, to the ‘land of milk and honey’, and, by turns, into exile and dispersion.

Then in Jesus, God said not ‘Go’ but ‘Come’: come, follow me; come to me with your burdens; come through me to the Father. When Jesus did tell people to go somewhere, it was usually home – once they had been healed and restored to their full humanity.

In Christ our goings are turned tocomings. The impulse to roam gives way to the invitation to belong. As the prodigal son discovered, our conversion is to homecoming. From Jesus’ lips, the only ‘Go’ without apparent homecoming is into the world to preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16) – the greatest homecoming of all.

Towards the end of his life, that taciturn priest-poet R S Thomas moved to Aberdaron, at the very end of the Llŷn Peninsula. From there, it’s a short and tricky crossing to Bardsey. For Thomas the ‘Island of a Thousand Saints’ held the lure of the beyond, as it did for seekers of a pre-modern age. In his poem Pilgrimages he follows in their steps, but asks:

… Am I too late?
Were they too late also, those first pilgrims? He is such a fast God, always before us and leaving as we arrive.

… Was the pilgrimage I made to come to my own self, to learn that in times like these and for one like me God will never be plain and out there, but dark rather and inexplicable, as though he were in here?

The Green movement stands for slow travel, slow food and slow consumption. We might say with some justification that we confess a ‘slow God’. But R S Thomas has a warning for us. Even a slow God can be a delusion. Any God who is ‘plain and out there’ will give us a wild goose chase.

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When we see with the telescopic perspective of Jesus, the whole world becomes my neighbour. Then we can take the advice offered by St Romuald to his novices: ‘Sit like a chick, eating nothing and tasting nothing but what its mother brings to it’. That is the essence of ‘local living’.

God of journey, our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Give us courage:

not to search the nations for our desire,
but to let the Desire of Nations find a home in us
Come Lord Jesus

not to choose the no-strings anonymity of the stranger,
but the risk and reward of becoming a neighbour
Come Lord Jesus

not to go looking for such life as we can afford,
but to receive as much as life we dare
Come Lord Jesus

not to go and acquire
but to stay put and be enriched
Come Lord Jesus.

Give us the courage to say with our lips
and in the choices of our lives
Come Lord Jesus.
A **RETREAT** at Ringsfield Hall, Suffolk
Friday 18 - Sunday 20 October 2013

…and a little child shall lead them

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