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awakening to a

This is our yearning and hope

Mary Grey began the conference with a moving meditation

I want to begin by retelling Luke's parable about the rich farmer (Luke 12.15-21). You know it well: it is in the context of Jesus warning his followers against all kinds of greed and His teaching on wealth. He told them of a rich man whose crops yielded a gigantic harvest and he had nowhere to store them. So he decides to pull them down and build better and ever-bigger ones. Then he tells his soul – eat, drink and be merry – enjoy yourself! And I never fail to be chilled by the next words: 'You fool,' God says. 'This very night I will demand your soul – this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?' This is a man who typifies a 'more' culture, a culture which has lost its communal soul, which cannot understand the imperative of 'enough is enough' let alone the capacity for 'joy in enough'. Eco-theologian, the late Thomas Berry called this a 'deep cultural pathology ... When the power of ecstasy is subverted into destructive channels ... we are in a disastrous situation'.

How can society find its way back from a culture of 'more' to a culture of 'enough'? That's the task we set ourselves today. I tried to Google this

sense of a loss of a corporate soul typified by the Lukan rich man, and all I could find were individualistic programmes offering healing from addictions. Yes, important, but it's communal/collective addiction we are speaking of. How to transform the desire of society for more things – the equivalent of the rich man's barns – to what truly brings joy, shared well-being and flourishing. T. S. Eliot cautions us that the path is not easy:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait
without hope
For hope would be hope for the
wrong thing: wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong
thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the
hope are all in the waiting.
(T.S Eliot, *East Coker in Poems*,
London: Faber and Faber, 1974,
p.200)

In this network – CEL – we have prioritised a right relationship with the earth as a pre-requisite for communal well-being and flourishing, part of the vision we share of the Kingdom of God, as a kingdom, a shalom of right relationship. As the late David Toolan SJ

beautifully put it: 'We are great mothering nature's soul-space, her heart and vocal chords – and her willingness, if we consent to



it, to be spirited, to be the vessel of the Holy One whose concern reaches out to all that is created. When we fail in this soul-work, nature fails/falls with us. But when it happens, when we say yes to the Spirit who hovers over our inner chaos, the mountains clap their hands, the hills leap like gazelles' (David Toolan, *At Home in the Cosmos*, Orbis, 2003, p.215).

He gives us here a sense of the recovery of joy, the sense of the fulfilment of desire. But he also stresses patience – as Eliot suggested in the metaphor of waiting. Cathy Campbell, in *Stations of the Banquet*¹ (a Lenten book), describes this as a very active patience, characterised by

enough

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two practices or disciplines, one to awaken the heart, and the second to dismantle structures that harden the heart. The practices to awaken the heart include developing eyes that see and ears that hear; 'a heart that welcomes the stranger, hands that offer food to the hungry, and freedom to the captive and enslaved; a mind that discerns the path of truth and wisdom; ... and a soul that thirsts in the infinite love and always-enoughness of God' (NB God is joy and God is enough). The structures that harden the heart include the threads of addiction – hate, violence, acquisitiveness, excessive attachments, greed; patterns of discrimination like racism, sexism and individualism; justifications for inequity, scarcity and exclusion; and all the practices that harm the integrity of creation. How, you might ask, should we activate this active patience in a culture of impatience and instant gratification? One way, she suggests, is by keeping the Sabbath holy as a communal practice. And by holding together creation and liberation as two sides of the same coin. In case you think that Sabbath rest is a cop-out, this book stresses that Sabbath is all about work – good work – the redemption of work, the retuning of work to its rightful place within the vision of the service of all human and non-human needs, in anticipation of the new creation, the coming Kingdom.

I believe this is something that touches our deepest longings, and the source of real joy: isn't that what we really want; isn't this our longing, that through the healing of multiple broken connections, we become reconciled to our deepest selves, with each other and with the earth? Truly 'joy in enough'.

In the end it is only this vision that keeps us going with the Sabbath task, what Thomas Berry calls 'The Great Work', and restores a lost soul, lost to our culture of more-than-enough, of never-enough. The vision, not of returning to Eden, whence the fertile river flows,² but of the restored city, of a reconciled Jerusalem, where 'the leaves of the tree are for the healing of

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the nations' (Rev. 22.1) and the crystal waters of life flow through our streets. Treading this path, our wild yet sacred longings for a healed cosmos are kept alive by the Spirit, whom I imagine not as gentle dove but as Wild Bird: she keeps our hearts restless for a time, while our joy will really consist in working for when the deserts become

once again fertile, when sacred rivers flow again, and the long suffering of desolate people, excluded by a culture of more, is at an end. Our joyous hearts will be able to expand with boundless compassion towards all such communities around the globe. Remember, Jesus said, 'I want your joy to be full' (John 10.10) – and the dawn of a transformed world will ever beckon us to enlarge our horizons.

Humanity's perennial question is, What do we really want? The goal is to set in motion the transformation from 'more' to 'joy in enough' and to break the fetters of addiction to consumerism and the domination of the free market system in our culture. This is the challenge. In the recovery of our communal soul we discover both answer and way forward. Desire and longing of heart and soul find true fulfilment in enabling the happiness of others: in hospitality and openness to the other we recover the joyous possibilities of our interconnected selves. We long for authentic experiences of Sacred Presence. We long too for the healing of communities destroyed by greed, for communities to relearn to practise relations of intimacy and mutuality.

All of this comes together in our yearning for justice – longing for the reconciliation of groups divided by excessive wealth and greed is realised only by the prioritising of justice. Longing for enough, longing for

1. Cathy Campbell, *Stations of the Banquet*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), pp.206-7.

2 I disagree here with Alastair McIntosh, *Soil and Soul* (Aurum, 2004), p.247. Returning to Eden is nostalgic and regressive. Constructing ecological, sustainable futures is our mission.

continued on page 6

The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope

Stephen Retout reports and reflects on the Joy in Enough Conference

The article in *Green Christian 76* about the new CEL Joy in Enough project caught my imagination, resonating as it did with my own thinking around the financial crisis and day-to-day experience working in the public sector.

So, on Saturday 29 March I found myself at Carrs Lane Conference Centre in Birmingham. The closed Wesley Owen bookshop on the site was a stark sign that Christians are not immune to economic forces. This was the third Christian bookshop to cease trading in Birmingham in recent years.

There was a buzz of anticipation as the delegates gathered. Paul

continued from page 5

recovery of our collective soul, and longing for God come together in a resting place where desires are satisfied and fulfilled in justice for all vulnerable communities and a sustainable economy for the earth. This is our yearning, our hope: that the earth's woundedness be over and that together we know each other in a flowing world where all yearnings are realised in truth, peace and love. Only then will we awaken to a deeper yearning, and know ourselves held and cherished by the desire of God's very self. ■

Mary Grey is a Roman Catholic liberation theologian, now Professor Emeritus of the University of Wales, Lampeter. In addition to ecological theology she is very involved with justice and peace issues in the Holy Lands and now a core member of the Balfour Project www.balfourproject.org She was co-founder with Dr Nicholas Grey (1987) of the NGO, Wells for India, a water-based organisation in Rajasthan, NW India.



Left to right: Dan O'Neil, Paul Bodenham, Mary Grey

Bodenham, the CEL Chairman, captured the mood of the day in his welcome address. He told us that the conference had been fully booked for two months – unprecedented for a CEL event, Paul said the project seemed to be riding the wave of something significant. In his view, the events of the recession and financial crisis showed that orthodox economics did not seem to be working.

In her opening theological reflection Professor Mary Grey (for the full text see the previous pages) inspired us all with the succinct theological insights that 'God is Joy' and 'God is Enough'. She suggested that apart from recovering joy and a right relationship with nature, there was a need to tackle the structures that harden our hearts to the fate of the planet and the poor.

The real difference in this CEL conference from others I have attended was that we were engaging with another discipline in some detail – ecological economics. The key speaker Dr Dan O'Neill is the Chief Economist at the Center for the Advancement of Steady State Economics at Leeds. Another difference from other conferences was the amount of reading we all did prior to the event, including Dan O'Neill's co-authored book *Enough is Enough*.

Dan summarised three key reasons to question continuous economic growth. The first of these was the environmental cost of climate change,

biodiversity loss and the depletion of the nitrogen cycle. Secondly, happiness indicators had not shown any increase since 1950 despite a tripling of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Finally, economic growth above 2% was the historical exception since the oil crisis of 1972.

Dan referred us to various resources, available at SSE.org, which explained the above issues and possible ways forward to manage our economies differently.

A key difference in a steady state economy would be a shift from globalisation to localisation. Important ideas included limitation of resource use, reduction of working hours as productivity increased, and a more equitable distribution of wealth. Dan critiqued the reliance on debt of the

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major western economies and outlined the need for a reform of the monetary system. He saw the fixation with GDP as something which needed to be remedied, with other measures being used that take account of human wellbeing and resource depletion.

Mary and Dan's addresses had brought together a lot of ideas about the interaction of theology and steady state economics, which needed careful reflection and the first part of this took place in the workshops.

For the morning session I chose Working Group 4 on Consumerism and Social Capital. The group exercise brought out the reality that we are all



Intense listening by delegates

immersed in the consumer culture. None of us are ideologically pure and we live in communities that influence us to act in different ways. Several of the group felt uncomfortable with questions about our relationship with consumer goods and there were admissions of storage problems for our excess possessions.

Mary Grey provided some helpful insights on 'Kingdom Economics'. Pointing out that this is not a new idea, she mentioned John Taylor's book *Enough is Enough* from the 1970s. I felt proud I had this on my bookshelves at home. I also felt embarrassed by the thought of the excessive numbers of theology books accumulated at home over many years – perhaps I should have confessed this in the group exercise?

The group leader gave us three points to reflect on about consumerism:

1. The need to seek simplicity instead of complexity/clutter in our lives.
2. Understand where our identity comes from?
3. Social Capital. We seem to have increasing shortages of time to interact with neighbours and family.

In the closing reflection, we were asked to consider what it felt like when we bought something. This was compared to St Ignatius's idea of transitory joy and was in contrast to the lasting joy of more authentic experiences than simply buying things.

During the lunch interval I spoke to Gail Rogers, a theological student from Queen's Foundation Birmingham and not a CEL member, who said: 'Dan was fantastic. My chin dropped to the floor as I suddenly realised how we were relying on the vulnerable to keep the economy going. But when there is a surplus they are the last ones to reap

the rewards. There is a social gap in the way the economy operates.'

Paul Bodenham again captured the mood of the conference in his summing-up before the afternoon sessions, stating in good-humoured exasperation: 'There's just so much!'

He explained that the conference was a first step to capture the diversity of ideas in a long process of the Joy in Enough project. At some point the project team would need to focus and create a shape for future work.

An indication of the diversity of thinking was seen in Working Group 1. In a case study two groups were each asked to suggest biblical references to

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support a more enlightened economic approach for a multinational corporation. The groups produced two entirely different set of biblical quotations at the end of the exercises!

Paul recapitulated the conference aims, especially the need to obtain some theological imperatives for a post-growth economy. Here and in the final plenary session, the conference was asked to give views on how we go forward to bring about the aims above.

One group of ideas centred on reclaiming the feasts of the Sabbath, Harvest Festival and Christmas, as vehicles to challenge consumerism. Another set proposed that the economics of local Churches might be a resource. As part of their mission, Churches could be examples of sustainable living for the wider society. However, the group recognised that Churches did not always live up to the highest standards of sustainability.

One delegate proposed that we should be ambassadors for real joy, rediscovering the gospel and the concepts of shalom and the Kingdom of

Heaven. However, it was important we were not labelled as Utopian. We needed to act prophetically, both speaking out against consumerism and living an alternative lifestyle. We also need to get an understanding of how much is 'enough'.

The importance of the 2015 General Election was identified. We needed to develop a broader context of steady state economics for our questions to MPs. Dan suggested we should direct our MPs to the online film about steady state economics at SSE.org, to take them outside the box of continuous growth.

Mary Grey pointed out the need to start where we are and not to lose hope. My strong impression is that we ended the day filled with hope for the future of the 'Joy in Enough' project. CEL has a really strong conversation partner in the Centre for the Advancement of Steady State Economics. The website SSE.org gives some excellent resources for challenging the endless growth paradigm. We have some really good resources on the CEL website, which will doubtless develop in the light of this initial conference. The working groups have already unearthed rich possibilities for taking the project forward.

Dan O'Neill reminded us, quoting Thomas Berry, that only through understanding our outer life can we understand our inner life. The Joy in Enough conference has shown us that the opportunity and challenge for CEL and all Christians are both clear. To quote the title of one of Mary Grey's books, this challenge to orthodox economics is nothing less than *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope*. ■

CEL is delighted to be cooperating with A Rocha and Speak in the JiE project and acknowledges all their help and participation in the conference. Editor

Steve Retout has been a CEL member for nearly twenty years and lives in Derby. Having recently taken early retirement he hopes to get more involved with ecotheology and green issues. Steve experiences the natural world mainly through long distance walking especially in the Derbyshire Peak District and Wales.