

Christian Vegetarian Association UK

Working towards a violence-free world

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Affiliated Ministry
CVA (USA)



WHAT THE CHRISTIAN PAPERS SAY

March 2008

Contributors

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All members

Please cut and send any items of interest from any publication, to Don Gwillim for consideration.

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You can now view this document on the Internet , go to:
www.christianvegetarian.co.uk and follow link to Christian Media.

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Please Note

Owing to pressure of work this edition includes some cuttings dated Jan/Feb. 2008.

As this is a rather large publication, member's letters to church magazines & the local press will be published in our next newsletter.

Special Interest: Follow the ongoing vegetarian articles & letters in the Catholic Times.

Why concern for the environment is so important to CVAUK's campaigns

As you read this press compilation you will notice that 75% of articles/letters are concerning the environment, CVAUK believe that to have any chance of introducing vegetarianism into the church we need to jump onto this environmental bandwagon to show that vegetarianism is a logical Christian response to caring for God's creation.

We should encourage discussions in church/house groups on sustainability and highlight scriptures that confirm;

- (a) God's goodness and mercy embraces all of God's creation,
- (b) that by being made in God's image, we have a responsibility to become good stewards, caring for God's creation as God cares for us,
- (c) that the Gospel is good news for the whole of God's creation, not just humankind.

We should use every opportunity to pray for environmental justice for the poor and the rest of God's creation and submit articles to church newsletters/magazines. Once established you can argue that vegetarianism is a logical Christian response to humankind's destruction of god's creation. 'What the Christian Papers Say' is a fantastic resource which can be used to compose your prayers and support statements in your letters/articles to Christian newspapers and church magazines.

In a hurry, 'must read' articles are highlighted by adding an asterisk on both sides of the title, as below:

Climate change could force 1 billion people from their homes

Unpublished letters

Many of us spend hours researching and writing unpublished letters to the Christian press. Do not let your efforts go to waste they could help and inspire other CVAUK members.

Please send to CVAUK any unpublished letters, together with a copy of the letter / article that initiated your letter, for possible inclusion in future CVAUK press compilations. For closing dates see front page.

N.B. The CVAUK press compilation also embraces a worldwide audience via. our website www.christianvegetarian.co.uk.

When writing letters to the press criticise constructively

There are times when we have to speak out. Issues of injustice and pain and suffering pull on the chords of our heart and we feel we must do something. So we should - righteousness and justice are from the same stable.

However, when we do feel the need to criticise - whether that be our politicians, our society or our church - we should do so with the conviction that we want to see people grow and develop. We should learn to speak the truth in love. It's better to say nothing, than to say something because of hate or prejudice.

Get involved

We cannot criticise our world, our society or our leaders if we are not willing to be part of the solution. Everyone of us is able to be a protester! We know what we do not like. If we feel passionate about politicians losing trust, then maybe we should become an example of a trustworthy politician? If we think our community is losing its identity and its strength, maybe we should help it to find it again.

Of course we need also to pray - to rely on God and his grace working through us. The more we connect with him, the more we will reflect him to the world around us. Here's a challenge we may not like - perhaps we have ended up with the society, government and leaders we deserve? Maybe, just maybe, there is a better, brighter and fairer society round the corner. Maybe it is hidden in the hearts of our neighbours and our friends. Maybe God is challenging us to move from our comfort zones to the place where he always wanted us to be - shaping and changing our world by being in it, but not of it. That would make us read the news differently, wouldn't it?

Rev. Malcolm Duncan

Extract from 'Looking for a leader' Christian Herald 21st May 2005.

The Catholic Times

26th August 2007

Creations that insult human dignity

On the understanding that humans are created for unique relationship with God, the creation of mammals, that is, human-animal mixtures, is an insult to human dignity.

In the first book of Genesis when we are told that humans are created (in the image of God. No other creatures are described in these terms. Moreover, humans are told to be the stewards of the rest of creation with the implication that they, and they alone, are responsible before God for what they do and fail to in the order of creation. Thus, on the Old Testament understanding, humans have a special covenant-relationship with God, which involves a caretaker responsibility for the rest of creation, including our own off-spring. And if, with Noah, the divine covenant with mankind established at the beginning was extended to embrace other creatures, this was through humankind (Gen 9). No where in Scripture are humans and animals placed 'on the same footing

According to the Pauline letters in the New Testament, we are the creatures with whom God unites Himself in the Incarnation and became man, in order to "unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things, on earth" (Eph 1:10), and "to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven" (Col 1:19-20). Here, as in the Old Testament it is made clear that the beasts living with man on earth do through us enter into a special relationship with God.

On a Christian understanding, humans clearly have a unique position in the order of creation at the same time as we are meant to adopt an attitude of care and respect for other creatures. And yet we may use other creatures in a way that we may not use other humans. Murder is a sin, but we have been given a dispensation to kill animals for food (Gen 9). Thus St Thomas said, that "it is not unlawful to use plants for the good of animals and animals for the good of man", and so that "it is lawful both to take life from plants for the use of animals, and from animals for the use of men" (Summa Theologia, I. II, q. 64). Created in the image of God we have been prioritised as well as given responsibilities.

But in the world in which God is dead, there is no image of God. Hence, there is little distinction between man and beast. In this world feelings of empathy may prevent many humans from being cruel to other humans and even to other creatures as sentient being. Indeed, sentience and awareness will be the basis on which others are deemed worthy of any respect. Creatures not lacking these attributes, creatures for whom it difficult to feel empathy because of their inability to suffer as we may suffer, will be afforded scant respect.

In the world in which there is no image of God, there is no reason not to welcome the creation of creatures of partly human and partly animal origin, if such creatures may serve to promote human ends. And I take it that this is the world in which the Royal Society acts and works, as it has whole heartedly welcomed the attitude to creation of human-animal mixtures adopted by the Joint Committee on the Draft Human Tissue and Embryo Bill.

In the report published, on August 1, by the Joint Committee established by the two houses of Parliament, the Government's Draft Bill was criticised for proposing a ban on the creation of inter-species embryos. And the Joint Committee asked that "the issue should be put to a free vote in both Houses". No doubt, the Committee thinks that the two Houses will be swayed by arguments in favour of the creation of human-animal mixtures for research purposes.

That is, the two Houses will be told that we need to create human-animal embryos, because it has proved impossible to create enough fully human embryos for stem-cell research and, also, that we need embryonic stem-cell research in our search for new therapies for conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

But the last part of the argument is doubtful, given that much progress has already been made in the area of adult stem-cell research and therapy, which – unlike embryo stem-cell research – involves no destruction of embryonic life. That it has proved impossible to get enough human eggs for the creation of embryos for stem-cell research is, however, correct. And this is hardly surprising. What woman would want to donate eggs to scientists so that they can create embryos, with a view to 'harvesting' their stem cells, and thus kill them?

So what is being proposed is the use of rabbit or cow egg in order to create embryos whose genetic make-up is about 99 per cent human. These embryos, then, would be created by cloning. The cell nucleus of a rabbit or cow egg would be removed and the cell nucleus of a somatic human cell, such as a skin cell, would be inserted instead. The new entity, called a cybrid by the Joint Committee, would house human chromosomes in its cell nucleus and a few animal genes in the cytoplasm left in the animal egg.

As the entity is nearly human, it might be regarded as a defective human embryo. But, because it houses animal genes, it remains an open question how useful it will prove for research into cures for humans.

Whether cybrids would be useful or not should not be the deciding issue. For the morally decisive questions are whether we should cross the species barrier and make sub-humans and whether we should ever treat human embryos as disposable material? #

9th September 2007

No dignity in slaughter

YEAR after year, the Genesis verse 9:3 is uprooted from its original context in an attempt to harmonise slaughterhouse activity with the Christian path through life. (Agneta Sutton: "Creations that insult human dignity" - The Catholic Times, August 26).

The divine dispensation received by a fallen Adam and Eve before an impending ice-age has little relevance in today's affluent European nations. We have a reluctance to progress from the ancient lifestyle of those that were taught to aspire towards approximating the vision: "...Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

Yet the historical vegetarian movement in Britain was driven by deeply religious individuals whose concept of "human dignity" extended to those that were demoralised and degraded through slaughterhouse employment.

A certain incongruity remains between civilised existence and acts of slaughter which involve throat-cutting. The ethical disparity is evident within any advanced culture and particularly pertinent to religious life. Yet theology often lends itself to the reversal of right from wrong rather than acknowledgement of human fallibility. The Catholic Dictionary of 1897 was particularly detested by humanitarians for over 50 years for suggesting: "The brutes are made for man who has the same right over them which he has over plants and stones."

We have nonetheless made progress in that semi-critics of vegetarianism are prepared to acknowledge "...sentience and awareness will be the basis on which others are deemed worthy of respect." Yet the implications are immense and for many compassionate people the Catholic Church still appears to be walking backwards.

If we are prepared to compromise the peaceable kingdom on earth for the sake of sausages or hamburgers then many who would otherwise consider Catholic spirituality will continue to shake their heads. It is time the Church understood that there are ethical elements within society that will not always distinguish between imperfect witness and the trappings of savagery.

John M. Gilheany Roath, Cardiff

#

9th September 2007

Pope calls for action on environment

By Mary Roberts

POPE Benedict led the first Catholic eco-friendly youth rally last weekend and told the half a million people gathered that world leaders must make courageous decisions to save the planet "before it is too late."

"A decisive 'yes' is needed in decisions to safeguard creation as well as a strong commitment to reverse tendencies that risk leading to irreversible situations of degradation," he said.

Wearing green vestments, he spoke to a crowd of mostly young people sprawled over a hillside near the Adriatic city of Loreto on the day the Catholic Church in Italy observed its annual Save Creation Day.

More than 300,000 people had slept on blankets and in tents or prayed during the night. They were then joined by a further 200,000 more who arrived from throughout Italy on Sunday. The Pope focused on water, which he described as a "precious" resource and a potential source of tension and conflict.

"New generations will be entrusted with the future of the planet, which bears clear signs of a type of development that has not always protected nature's delicate equilibriums," the Pope said.

In one of his strongest environmental appeals, the Pope said: "Courageous choices that can recreate a strong alliance between man and earth must be made before it is too late." He closed the rally with a Sunday morning Mass.

It was the first environmentally friendly youth rally, a break from gatherings that have left tons of rubbish and waste. Participants had backpacks made of recyclable material, flashlights operated by cranks instead of batteries, and colour-coded trash bags so personal garbage could be easily recycled. Meals were served on biodegradable plates. Tens of thousands of prayer books for the Mass were printed on recycled paper and trees will be planted to compensate for the carbon produced at the event, many in areas of southern Italy devastated by recent brush fires.

Under the Pope and his predecessor Pope John Paul II, the Vatican has become progressively 'green', installing solar panels on buildings to produce electricity and holding a scientific conference to discuss global warming and climate change. The Pope also condemned arsonists who set fire to parts of Greece and Italy in recent weeks, causing both human death and enormous environmental damage.

The Church of England has also called for environmental changes in a new brief paper and even said it is a "matter of national security."

"Drought and other climate-related shocks risk sparking violence and conflict," the paper warns.

"Climate security is now a core foreign policy priority, intimately connected with foreign and trade policy, security and geopolitics, as it threatens to push many communities still further into poverty and frustrates international efforts to deliver on the millennium development goals," says the paper from the Church's mission and public affairs division.

#

9th September 2007 Comment - Evangelise the environment

THIS week the Pope has also asked us to help protect the environment. Like evangelisation, we all need to pull together and do our bit. From recycling to energy saving, from taking fewer car and plane journeys to trying to reduce the amount of things we waste, global warming is in all our interests to curtail and, for the sake of our children and grandchildren's offspring, we must act now.

Pope Benedict spoke of the "the continual effort to make one's own contribution to building a more just and solid society, where all can enjoy the goods of the earth." "This year," he said, "attention is focused above all on water, a most precious good that, if it is not shared in a fair and peaceful way, will unfortunately become a cause for significant tensions and bitter conflicts."

Water is the everlasting life that we enjoy now in Christ. That's why the scripture says in 1 John 5:12: "He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life." Without water there cannot be life: without the Lord Jesus Christ there cannot be eternal life.

There is so much to be done. If we all do our small bit for the Church and the world, surely we can turn round some of the damage already done. Urgent action, and prayer, is what we need to bring our planet back from the brink. #

16th September 2007 Pope's global plea for safe environment by Carol Glatz

INDUSTRIALISED nations "must share clean technologies" with developing nations, as well as curb the demand for goods that damage the environment, Pope Benedict XVI said. Countries with emerging economies and undergoing rapid industrialisation "are not morally free to repeat the past errors of others b) recklessly continuing to damage the environment", the Pope said in message to environmental and religious leaders meeting in Greenland. As such, "highly industrialised countries must share clean technologies and ensure that their own markets do not sustain demand for goods whose very production contributes to the proliferation of pollution", he said.

The message was addressed to Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, one of the sponsors of the seventh Religion, Science and the Environment symposium on the Arctic. The meeting in Ilulissat, Greenland, brought together religious leaders from numerous traditions to focus on the impact pollution and climate change have had on the island's rapidly melting glaciers.

"Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family," said the Pope. "No nation or business sector can ignore the ethical implications present in all economic and social development." Scientific research is increasingly clear in showing individual human actions can have "world-wide effects", he said.

"The consequences of disregard for the environment cannot be limited to an immediate area or population because they always harm human coexistence, and thus betray human dignity and violate the rights of citizens who desire to live in a safe environment." He said that, while people increasingly are aware that every individual "must take seriously the responsibility" to safeguard the earth's resources, global solutions are needed, including increased co-operation between industrialised and developing nations. #

16th September 2008 Benedict appeals for water of life by Cindy Wooden

WHEN Pope Benedict XVI turns on the tap in his Vatican apartment, it's a reminder that potable water is a precious resource in today's world. The 109-acre Vatican City does not have its own water source, and it relies on Italy to furnish it with the estimated five million cubic meters of water consumed inside the Vatican each year.

Although that arrangement is guaranteed by a 1929 treaty, in recent years some Italians have been grouching about the increasingly high cost of keeping the Vatican from going dry. When the treaty was drafted, of course, it didn't seem like a big deal to promise the Vatican an everlasting "adequate endowment of water". But today, things have changed: In many countries, water has become a sensitive environmental, political and economic issue.

In recent remarks to young people at an Italian Marian shrine, Pope Benedict said he was concerned about the equitable sharing of the world's water supplies and warned that water shortages could easily fuel conflicts.. Three days later the Pope sent greeting to an environmental conference in Greenland, saying the care of water resources was of "grave importance" for the entire human family.

Last March, on World Water Day, a papal message called access to water an "inalienable right" that needs to be protected through changes in lifestyle. The Pope's appeals were brief but they reflected the Vatican's increasing interest in the moral, political and scientific aspects of the world's safe water supply.

In 2005, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences hosted an important meeting on water and the environment. Experts pointed out that more than one billion people lack access to adequate drinking water, and that climate changes – including global warming and desertification – could aggravate the situation for many populations.

A final statement from the academy's meeting looked at long-term strategies to reduce water pollution and ensure sufficient supplies. It also emphasised that, particularly in today's globalised economy, water must be treated as a fundamental resource that belongs to all.

In 2003 the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace prepared a major document: *Water, an Essential Element for Life*. Last year, council officials presented an update at the Fourth World Water Forum in Mexico, stating: "Today common agreement exists that the survival of humanity and all species on earth depends to a great degree on the fate of water." More specifically, the council said richer countries should do more to guarantee adequate safe water in poorer countries, where supplies are at greatest risk and where investment in infrastructure is urgently needed.

The council's Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church emphasises that water by its very nature "cannot be treated as just another commodity among many" It said water must be regarded as a public good even when its distribution is entrusted to the private sector.

That's an important point in a era when water is increasingly seen as a commodity. At the Pontifical Academy of Science conference, one expert said water – the blue gold" of the 21st century – was seen today as an economic good by major corporations and international lending institutions.

The Vatican's interest in water resources goes beyond position papers. Last spring, Cardinal Renato Martino, president of the justice and peace council, told reporters how the issue came home to him when he visited Africa and saw people walking for miles to fetch their daily supply of safe water. Often, the poor are paying for safe water – and paying much more than well-off populations in the same country, according to a UN study in Kenya in 2006.

Unfortunately, access to clean water in Africa is not improving, according to a report earlier this year by the African Development Bank. It said Africa was unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goal of safe drinking water for 78 percent of the population by 2015. The report said that in major African cities 50 per cent of safe water is wasted, much of it through leaky pipes and general inefficiency.

The Vatican missionary news agency, Fides, recently published a lengthy report titled *Water, Source of Life for the Christian and for Humanity*. Citing UN reports, it said lack of access to safe water was primarily a problem of resource management and not due to a shortage of fresh water.

It warned that UN experts fore-see a worsening of the problem in coming decades, with some predicting that by 2050 half the global population will experience short-ages of clean water. The Church's missionary personnel often see the problem from a different and closer perspective than desk-bound bureaucrats. In the Fides dossier, a missionary priest in Bangladesh identified only as "Fr Rudy" brought it to a human level.

During recent heavy rains, the priest said, many Bangladeshis were collecting as much runoff water as they could, directing the flow from tin roofs to large terra cotta vases. Why was rainwater in such strong demand? Because arsenic contamination has been discovered in much of Bangladesh's water supply, the priest said.

At a meeting' of the Royal Geographical Society in London on August 29, experts illustrated the extent of the arsenic problem, saying it has been underestimated worldwide. They said that in Bangladesh, the most affected country, hundreds of thousands of people were expected to die from the arsenic poisoning of the water supply. The Church tries to look at this and other environmental crises realistically but not pessimistically.

As Pope Paul VI told water experts in 1975, the Christian scientist should honestly address the problem, but with the confidence that nature has in store "secret possibilities" that are up to intelligence to discover. #

7th October 2007

*** Talking Point***

While Christianity preaches love and compassion, Louise Clark asks how Catholics can inflict pain and torture on bulls to celebrate a feast of Our Lady.

"There is something so very dreadful . . . in tormenting those ... who cannot defend themselves, who are utterly in our power, who have neither weapons of offence or defence, that none but very hardened persons can endure the thought of it."

(Cardinal John Henry Newman)

THE values of love, compassion and kindness are central to the Christian faith. Why then is a feast day commemorating the Virgin Mary epitomised by violence, brutality and the deliberate infliction of suffering upon another? Perhaps you think that this is an exaggeration and that such scenes of barbarism have rightly been consigned to the history books. Sadly, however, you would be mistaken.. Every year, an event takes place in Spain for the feast day of the Virgin Mary. It is called the *Toro de la Vega* and happens in Tordesillas, in Castilla Leon in September.

During the event, a bull is chased through the town and taunted with lances. It can take an hour for the bull to die and during this time he suffers unspeakable agony and violent attack from spears being driven into his side. The individual who performs the final blow receives the bull's testicles or tail as trophies.

The tournament has been the subject of many demonstrations by those opposed to bullfighting and who consider this event to be the worst act of cruelty in Europe. Villagers have often been violent towards demonstrators in defence of their position and consequently, journalists are no longer allowed to film the event.

Although this 'sport' is very much part of another cultural tradition, it seems odd that it is acceptable in a traditional Catholic country.

Although the Church has historically de-emphasised animal welfare, one would think that it should be integral to Christian behaviour not to inflict such unnecessary and horrific suffering upon any of God's creatures. Unfortunately the negativity within Christianity stem from the writings of St Thomas Aquinas (1223 - 1274) instruments that exist for the sake of those who use them. Therefore, it followed that man is entitled to make use of animals in whichever way he chooses.

Nevertheless, these views were pre-scientific and given that it is now accepted that animals are sentient and conscious beings, a new era of interest in animal welfare ought to be emerging. This is certainly the case with the presence of Catholic Christian Concern, with-in the Catholic community, and other animal societies affiliated to other Christian denominations.

Arguably, although traditional theology has been derogatory towards animals, Popular tradition has always regarded them as of value in themselves following the example of St Francis of Assisi who articulated and portrayed a compassionate attitude towards animals. The amount of suffering that animals endure is vast and is mainly inflicted upon them by human beings or is the effect of human activity. Instances include the thousands of greyhounds which go missing each year once they become surplus to the racing industry despite making fantastic pets; bears in China kept in cages no bigger than their own body size and 'milked' twice a day for their bile from an open wound; and baby seals being clubbed to death for their fur. Other examples range from individual cases of neglect to the use of animals for hunting, fashion, entertainment, experimentation, food production and destruction of habitats.

Philosopher Peter Singer argues that an interest should be taken in the welfare of animals because animals will suffer if treated without such an interest being taken into account. Therefore, "if a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration" (Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*). The pain the individual animal experiences matters to that animal just as the pain an individual human being experiences matters to that human being.

We recognise that it is wrong to unnecessarily inflict pain on a non-consenting human being simply for pleasure, entertainment, sport or any other purpose. However, some are not willing to do the same when such activity is applied to other species simply because they are not human beings. Professor Andrew Linzey, an Anglican theologian, argues that humans are often willing to apply to animals what they would never apply to fellow human beings.

It would never be justifiable to chase a child through a town with spears and yet justifications are made when this is applied to animals. Tradition or competition is often given as an excuse or reason for the activity. But Linzey says this is a false rationalisation for the justification of cruelty. Instead, what is needed is the rediscovery of value and an awareness that other lives are of value in themselves.

Many agree, arguing that animals have intrinsic worth – they exist with a life of their own and with value in their own right. This leads to respect for others and renounces the claim to dominate and control. In turn, the victim (whether human or animal) and those exerting their power over them through violence are both liberated from a system of exploitation which is harmful to both.

When such suffering as the Toro de l Vega is inflicted upon animals in the name of religion it is particularly shocking. In Luke 12:6, Jesus is referred to as talking about the worth of sparrows and saying: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God." Clearly creation matters to God despite the low value human beings may place upon it. Therefore, the whole creation should matter to human beings. Humans often have a very anthropomorphic view of the world, but this is not backed by passages from the bible. Both the Old and New Testaments provide many examples where human beings are to have regard for animals. In Isaiah 11:6f and Romans 8:28, a final hope of peace and harmony is pictured amongst the whole creation. Job 39-41 tells of God's own proclamation and praise for animals.

Pope John Paul II argued that each should "commit oneself to the common good, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all" (*Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, para 38.3-38.4). Unfortunately, the Church has too often interpreted aspects of Genesis in a human-centred manner. Dominion has too often been interpreted as domination rather than care of the world by human beings. Louis Charles Birch, an Australian geneticist and theologian, argued that too much emphasis has been put on humans and this reflects our own "unwarranted arrogance".

Since human beings are responsible for a great deal of animal suffering, the church can redress the balance and take responsibility to convey a message which takes into account the intrinsic worth of animals. Moreover, individuals should influence policy for the sake of the welfare of those who suffer unnecessarily. In this way, those with power are using this power to be the voice for the sake of the powerless, whether the powerless are the forgotten human victims of poverty or the animal victims of human inconsideration or maliciousness.

One does not have to have a particular love for animals, however desirable this may be, to feel repulsed by their pain and to do all that is possible to ensure animals do not suffer needlessly. Whether this suffering takes the form of bulls being tortured to death purely for human entertainment or the slaughter of animals (including dogs and cats) for their fur, it is a Christian duty to stand up for the oppressed everywhere and oppose all sorts of unnecessary cruelty to both humans and animals.

Louise Clark is communications officer for the League Against Cruel Sports

21st October 2007 Church must condemn bullfighting

It must be of particular anguish to many Catholics to read the article by Louise Clark of the horrific treatment of young bulls in a Spanish festival dedicated to Our Lady (Talking Point, The Catholic Times, October 7).

Sadly, it is only one of a number of such brutal activities allowed to be carried out there in the name of that most gentle and most compassionate lady.

St Thomas Aquinas, blamed for considering that all beings were created exclusively for human use, also taught that all creatures were to fulfil their own natural purpose through correctly ordered behaviour. He could not therefore have tolerated the use to which barbarous people put these animals.

He also deplored cruelty on the grounds that it hardened the human spirit.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is equally adamant that "animals are God's creatures", and thus that "we owe them kindness".

So, well done, editor, for giving space to this vital subject on which all Catholics can speak with one voice.

Deborah Jones, Catholic Concern for Animals, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

I had the misfortune of seeing a televised bullfight while on holiday in Spain. Although the show was presented with all the glamour of Match of the Day, sport it certainly was not. It's time the Church spoke out against this nasty business.

Ms Pat Kane, Ipswich, Suffolk

#

21st October 2007 *Comment - Fast way to care for both body and soul*

The 'American disease' has finally reached our shores it emerged last week. British Government figures indicated that there is a looming public health crisis to rival that of climate change. Ministers, however, are currently drawing up plans for a concerted fight-back against obesity. Health Secretary Alan Johnson said efforts to promote exercise and healthy eating had to go "further and faster" in response to the stark findings of the study.

The Foresight research, commissioned in 2005 to help ministers understand the scale of the problem, warned that half the population will be obese within 25 years if current trends continue. Some 86 per cent of men are expected to be overweight within 15 years and 70 per cent of women within 20 years, Professor Klim McPherson of Oxford University and Tim Marsh of the National Heart Foundation predict.

Mr Johnson said the Government could not afford to allow the problem to deepen and is set to ask the Food Standards Agency to probe the use of unhealthy "trans-fats" in fast food. "For the first time, we are clear about the magnitude of the problem: we are facing a potential crisis on the scale of climate change, and it is in everybody's interest to turn things round," he said.

But Mr Johnson insisted that individuals had to shoulder some of the responsibility too as part of a "cultural and societal shift". "There is no single solution to tackle obesity and it cannot be tackled by Government action alone," he said. "We will only succeed if the problem is recognised, owned and addressed at every level and every part of society." Mr Johnson is right, of course. But he would do well to listen to sound advice coming from North of the Border.

Fat is a faith issue, declared Scotland's bishops' spokesman Peter Kearney, adding that soaring obesity rates indicated the nation's health could no longer be regarded as simply a matter for "diet gurus". Amid this consumer-driven society, Mr Kearney pointed to the traditional practice of fasting as one way we can begin the Battle of the Bulge. The Church never banned fasting, rather it just went out of vogue in a more lax society's approach to rules and rubrics.

On this World Mission Sunday, what could be a better idea than donating the money we would have spent on food on a Friday towards our Catholic aid agencies working in the developing world, while at the same time looking after our "ruined temples of the Holy Spirit"?

#

28th October 2007 Cowardly animal torments

Thank you for publishing the long overdue article by Louise Clark on animal cruelty (Talking Point, The Catholic Times, October 7.) Her brief account of Toro de la Vega, an event supposedly in honour of a Feast day to Our Lady should sicken any person with an ounce of compassion.

I had heard of the 'bull runs', which although not specifically 'religious' involve the prolonged cowardly torment of an innocent animal. Your photograph, showing nuns conniving in this barbarism, only increases one's revulsion.

Only a few years ago, my brother returned from a Mediterranean holiday with an account of how he had witnessed a nun throwing a live goat from a high tower. He had told me that if that was a 'blessing', it was a completely anti-Christian one. This happened at a so-called "religious festival".

Malta is a country, which deservedly won the George Cross during World War II for its valour against enormous odds. Yet, sadly, despite it being full of what I'm sure are hospitable 'good' Catholics there is a side to Maltese life, which means it, is certainly not at the top of my list of prospective holiday destinations. I refer to the trapping and shooting of thousands of migrating song-birds every year.

Earlier this year, I went on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, and saw the somewhat unedifying sight of an over-zealous nun "shooing" (to put it politely) a puppy dog away from the environs of St James's church. This dog had been a harmless source of fun to a German couple and their three young children. So much for the spirit of St Francis (Medjugorje is administered by the Franciscans). I expressed my displeasure to this nun by referring to St Francis, a saint who honoured God's creature with his compassion. The lady may not have spoken or understood English, but I hope she recognised that her attitude was not universally acceptable.

As a consequence of witnessing this, I placed a petition at Medjugorje for the millions of animals, which suffer, both in the wild and in cruel, industrialised 'farming' units, all subject to abuse for human profit and greed.

I have observed a reluctance within the Catholic press to publish letters on these issues. Perhaps it is time to cease turning a blind eye to the sufferings of our fellow creatures: If any church should cherish and celebrate the bio-diversity of our planet, surely it should be Catholicism. When will we come to our senses?

Dr John Roberts, Wakefield, West Yorkshire

I READ Louise Clark's article with a visceral sense of horror. Tormenting animals on a Catholic feast day aided and abetted by nuns? Guilt has always been a Catholic speciality, why no guilt about tormenting innocent animals? Perhaps those nuns in the photograph should develop a healthy guilt-trip about their collusion with the abuse and torment of animals. It would be a start. I despair.

Mrs Amanda Eagleton, Leeds, West Yorkshire

#

28th October 2007

Charity hears of MP's passion for animals

By Deborah Jones

Ann Widdecombe, MP and patron of Catholic Concern for Animals spoke at the charity's AGM last Saturday in Brompton Oratory's elegant hall. Speaking without notes and open to any questions, she delighted the audience with her candour and obvious passion for animal welfare.

After striving for many years to get the anti-hunting bill on the statute book, she knew that now the law was being widely flouted, and that brave – and totally peaceable – hunt monitors were being assaulted by hunt followers. She sounded out her proposal to have hunt monitors licensed by the police and for it be made an offence to disrupt them in their lawful duties of filming and reporting illegal hunts.

She then commented on the process that the Animal Welfare Bill went through before it was passed and the ludicrous attempts by "the bureaucrats" to include unreasonable regulations. One such was that cat owners – of whom Ann is famously one – should be obliged to know the proper weight for their cat! She confessed that she "would not have a clue" what her cats weighed and for that ignorance to be a criminal offence would be utter nonsense.

Lucy Fensom, founder of Safe Haven for Donkeys in the Holy Land, drew Miss Widdecombe's praise for having given up air-hostessing to care for abused donkeys in Israel and Gaza. Ms Widdecombe has previously visited the haven and was impressed by the work, and observed how helping animals so often involves helping people. Whilst there, she heard of an incident when Palestinian workers in Gaza were helped by an Israeli soldier in transporting an abandoned donkey to their sanctuary.

#

2nd November 2007

MP praises animal activists

ANN WIDDECOMBE, MP and patron of Catholic Concern for Animals, has spoken at the charity's AGM in Brompton Oratory's elegant hall, writes Deborah Jones. Speaking without notes and open to any questions, she delighted the audience with her candour and obvious passion for animal welfare.

After striving for many years to get the anti-hunting Bill on the statute book, Ann knew that now the law was being widely flouted, and that brave — and totally peaceable — hunt monitors were being assaulted by hunt followers. She sounded out her proposal to have hunt monitors licensed by the police and for it be made an offence to disrupt them in their lawful duties of filming and reporting illegal hunts.

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— of whom Ann is famously one — should be obliged to know the proper weight for their cat. She confessed that she "would not have a clue" what her cats weighed and for that ignorance to be a criminal offence would be utter nonsense.

Lucy Fensom, founder of Safe Haven for Donkeys in the Holy Land, drew Ann's praise for having given up working as an air hostess to care for abused donkeys in Israel and Gaza. On Ann's visit there she was by the work and by how helping animals so often involves helping people. She heard there of an incident in which Palestinian workers in Gaza were helped by an Israeli soldier in transporting an abandoned donkey to their sanctuary. When Miss Widdecombe retires from politics, as she will at the next election, not only will the House be a duller place, but animals too will lose a great champion. #

18th November 2007 Don't forget the 'dark' side of life in England

REFER to Dr Roberts' letter, headlined ('Cowardly Animal Torments', (The Catholic Times, October 28), where he states that Malta is not at the top of his list of holiday destinations because of the trapping and shooting of migrating song-birds – and this in spite of the fact that the country is full of hospitable "good" Catholics.

I read this letter on the same day that I heard on Sky News that Prince Harry had been questioned in connection with the alleged shooting of two very rare birds. (I am referring to the news item here, of course, and riot implying that Prince Harry was guilty of such an offence.) So it appears, according to the report, that the illegal shooting of birds takes place in other countries beside Malta.

Also, if I were to adopt the same line of reasoning (or not reasoning), I would eliminate England (and most other countries in the world) from my list of holiday destinations because of a dark "side" to English life – and I refer to the legal killing of thousands of babies in their mothers' wombs – an act that is funded and encouraged by the state.

Dr Roberts is obviously free to make his own choice of countries in his list of favourite holiday spots, but it is unfair on his part to denigrate the island of Malta because of what he terms "a side to Maltese life" which he dislikes. I dislike it too. And I dislike the cruelty of abortion even more. But when I visit England (which I love) I concentrate on so many other truly wonderful aspects of the English way of life. I do not think my visits there imply any approval of laws/customs that are unjust.

Theresa Galea-Curmi, Birkirkara, Malta

25th November 2007 * Are Christians meant to be vegetarian? * by Agneta Sutton

Television is full of food programmes. The newspapers always carry stories about good or bad food-and drink. This is also a country said to display sentimental attitudes towards animals. So given that red meet and processed meat now are labeled more or less poison, should we not stop eating meat?

Perhaps we should eat fish instead. Fatty fish is meant to be good for us. Or, perhaps we should just stick to vegetables? What should we do? Our forefathers might have been root, berry and nut gatherers. Perhaps we are meant to be vegetarian.

In the first book of Genesis we read: "And God said: 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.'" So, is meat-eating good for our bodies? Is it good for our souls?

Peter Singer, Professor of Ethics at Princeton University, and an avowed atheist, argues, in his book *Animal Liberation*, that it is arrogant to eat meat. In his view, not only does meat-eating reflect an attitude of superiority towards animals, but it also shows that "we regard their life and well-being subordinate to our taste for a particular kind of dish".

He says that "our practice of rearing and killing other animals in order to eat them is a clear instance of the sacrifice of the most important interests of other beings in order to satisfy trivial interests of our own". He says "trivial" because he holds that there is no nutritional advantage in meat-eating compared with a balanced vegetarian diet. In short, to his mind, we have a moral obligation to cease the practice of eating meat. Peter Singer might be right about the nutritional value of meat.

But is it intrinsically wrong to eat meat? Is it evil? In his *Summa Theologiae* St Thomas argued that it is lawful both to take life from plants for the use of animals and take life from animals for the use of men (ST, I, II, q.64). He said this is lawful because it is in keeping with the commandments of God Himself.

For not only is it written: 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' But it is also written: 'Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.'" (Gn 9:3)

The reference to the Genesis 9 — where Noah is told that everything that lives shall be food for him — implies that St Thomas sees the eating of meat as a special concession granted to humans in an imperfect world. In a perfect world things would be different.

Much the same position is adopted by the Swiss Reformist theologian Karl Barth – a theologian much admired by Hans Urs von Balthasar, who in turn was much admired by the last Pope, John Paul II. As Barth notes, not only is there no reference to the killing of animals for food in Genesis 1, which speaks of the beginning and a world free of sin, but there are also many biblical references to the end of this world which depict a world in which there is again total peace between man and beast, and between beast and beast, and so no killing.

Thus the prophet Isaiah speaks of a time when "the wolf shall lie down with lamb" (Is. 11:6) and of the "lion eating straw like the ox" (Is 65:25). And acting the mouthpiece of God, Hosea says: "And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things on the ground."

According to Barth our time is an interim period between a world not lapsed and the Kingdom of Heaven to come. But even if our world is an 'interim' world, we must, of course, have pity on animals and inflict as little pain and suffering on them as possible. Indeed, the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us of the gentleness with which saints like St Francis of Assisi and St Philip Neri treated animals.

Yet it also tells us that it "it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing". We may do so provided we treat animals kindly. The very divine dispensation to use animals for food and clothing entails caretaker responsibilities. We have been given the responsibilities of caretakers in the image of a loving God.

As such we should seek to avoid inflicting pain on other sentient creatures. Cruelty to animals spoils our image in that of a loving God. Moreover, as God-given life animals have intrinsic value. Animals are part of the giftedness of nature. They have a value in themselves. Their value does not solely reside in their usefulness to us. While on a Christian understanding, we are superior to other animals, it is precisely because we are spiritually and intellectually superior to other animals, that we humans have special caretaker responsibilities.#

2nd December 2007

'Pet dogs save clergy from loneliness'

ANIMAL cruelty should be made a pro-life issue, a leading activist has claimed. Deborah Jones, general secretary of Catholic Concern for Animals, called on the Pope to write an encyclical on animal welfare and urged the bishops to take the issue more seriously.

Earlier this week, a Government report overruled a ban on using wild animals in travelling circuses claiming there was not enough scientific evidence showing it harmed animals. The report by the Circus Working group said the welfare of animals kept in travelling circuses was not better or worse than that of animals kept in other captive environments.

But Deborah Jones said: "I find the conclusions of the report very unsatisfactory considering that so much pertinent material was not even discussed in the enquiry, as well as half of the enquiry panel being staffed by representatives of the circus industry. Of course, we at Catholic Concern for Animals do not accept the legitimacy at all of using animals in circuses, or for any similar display that is not for the animals' own benefit. As the Catechism tells us: "Animals are God's creatures (n. 2416) – not ours to do as we like with. We owe them kindness." She criticised the lack of interest on animal welfare shown by Catholic bishops. "We have three Anglican bishops on our committee but not a single Catholic one, despite numerous invitations. We don't even have a priest," she added.

"It's not that the Catholic bishops are anti-animal, it's just they don't regard it as an issue. Usually, they tell me they are busy. Well, many, many Catholics regard animal cruelty as a pro-life issue and I would like to see the bishops speaking on this. It would be wonderful if the next papal encyclical could be on animal cruelty." She said Catholic clergy in Britain lagged behind other denominations on the treatment of animals, despite the high profile the issue is given in the Catechism. "It's like priests want to pat my head and say, there, there, dear, go and look after your dogs." "I think every priest should have a dog. It would help them relate better to animals and save a lot of them from loneliness." "Looking after a dog really gives you an understanding of God's beautiful creation."

"Many of the saints were pet lovers. St Philip Neri used to shoo flies out the window rather than kill them. Martin de Porres ran an animal sanctuary and would take in strays of every kind including cats and rats. It wasn't just St Francis of Assisi who taught on this." "It's time the bishops' conference issued a document on animals. That would be a wonderful starting point." There are fewer than 50 animals involved in travelling circuses in Britain, including a retired but still touring elephant, seven tigers, five lions, a number of llamas, zebras and snakes.

But the Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses report, by the chair-man of the working group, Mike Radford of Aberdeen University, said animals such as tigers, elephants, sea lions, zebras and camels were still widely used in European circuses and a decision taken in Britain would be closely watched on the continent.

The RSPCA, which formed part of the welfare sub-group of the working group, called for the ban to be introduced. Dr Rob Atkinson, the head of wildlife science for the RSPCA, said: "Having tigers jump through hoops and bears ride bicycles does nothing to educate the public or foster respect for animals. These pathetic activities belong to a bygone age."

9th December 2008

No ban on use of animals in circuses

PLEASE allow me to correct some of the inaccuracies in the article by James Hastings (Pet dogs save clergy from loneliness, *The Catholic Times*, December 2).

There is at present no ban on the use of wild animals in circuses. Individual local authorities decide on a case-by-case basis whether to allow them.

Then, the note about the three Anglican bishops refers not to our committee, but to an Anglican one. We do enjoy the patronage, if not committee membership, of various distinguished clergy and our president is a Catholic bishop.

Thirdly, I did not presume to "call" on the Pope to do anything, but merely expressed a wish.

Deborah Jones, General Secretary, Catholic Concern for Animals

9th December 2007

The role of animals in God's plan of creation

THE article by Agneta Sutton (*The Catholic Times*, November 25) is sound but leaves the major problem of man's relationship with the planet and its plants and animals unclear. The three Abrahamic faiths accept the creation as expressed in Genesis, but most do not adhere to the literal translation on several counts.

Scientists can accept those faiths, but only insofar as they are consistent with the "natural law", created by God. Man was commanded to increase and multiply and fill the earth. The structure of human teeth is consistent with them being omnivores. Indeed, how could they live in the arctic, if they were not to some extent carnivorous.

If the human population is to increase as forecast, it will be necessary to reduce the animal population, which competes with humanity for food and in some areas of health and biosecurity. The responsibility for man to act as steward of the earth and its occupants, may allow him to kill animals for food and for research, without being cruel to them and to limit their ability to compete with man himself.

It may be that God's plan is in operation in modern agriculture, when animals perform at their most efficient, when husbandry is of a high standard. This should not be confused with the anthropomorphic treatment of animals, which developed under the name of welfare during the twentieth century. To allow all animals to increase and multiply without some check seems impossible without considerable suffering.

This probably implies humane slaughter is preferable to painful death from the disease and competition, which accompanies very high protected populations. Just as in Daniel (Chapter 1) a vegetarian diet may be OK for man; the question "What do we do about the animals?", must be answered. It may be a genetically manipulated lion, which will eat straw and lay down with the lamb. Then again, God may have other plans.

Dr A (Lou) Marsden, Clitheroe, Lancashire

I WAS puzzled by Agneta Sutton's article asking whether Christians ought to be vegetarians. Surely the fact that for so many years we Catholics were not expected to eat meat on Fridays was enough to say that we could on any other day.

A Towers, Manchester

16th December 2007

The future's green, bishop tells faithful

PROFILE Bess Twiston Davies chats with Bishop Chris Toohey on his 'Green Gospel' tour

LADIES and gentlemen, the environment is a big-ticket item," says Australia's 'green bishop'. "People are really beginning to spin out about climate change." Bishop Chris Toohey of the Western Australian diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes heads Catholic Earthcare, the ecology office of the Australian Bishops' Conference. We meet during his whistle-stop tour of the UK, preaching the Green Gospel, that the planet is important and Catholics have a moral duty to be stewards of the earth.

Really? Isn't ecology a political, rather than a moral issue? "That's a good question," says Bishop Toohey, in laid-back Aussie style. "These are political questions: on the other hand, a husband and wife in the kitchen is a political situation. Anything involving humans as a group is a political situation. But it is above party politics." Ecology, he acknowledges, is a big topic: "This is complicated — people are still trying to 'nut it' out: there's economics involved, there's equitable distribution of wealth involved, there's politics, earth's power, social justice. Once you start looking at it, it's a Pandora's box."

We meet just after Pope Benedict has stressed the importance of ecological issues, speaking at a youth rally of the need "to commit ourselves to caring for the created world, without squandering its resources". The starting point Bishop Toohey suggests is "to see the earth as a gift from God and all humans as a gift from God and my neighbours in other parts of the world as a gift from God". This implies a moral responsibility for how we use the earth.

"What would God say to me if I leave the planet he has trusted me with in a state?" asked Bishop Toohey.

"How can we even begin to think that leaving the planet in a mess is a morally acceptable thing to do? When a conscientious person rents a flat, if they move on elsewhere they are not going to leave the flat with dirty carpets, ink-marks on the walls, a dirty kitchen or bathroom. They are going to leave it as they found it."

Ignoring the problem is not an option. In the five years Bishop Toohey has headed up Catholic Earthcare Australia, he has seen environmental concerns zoom up the public agenda. Why is that? "Time is passing and there is more and more evidence emerging that the climate is changing, we see the ice caps are shrinking, they are growing vegetables in Greenland, that the Great Barrier Reef is dying, the ocean is becoming more acidic."

The basic problem, however, is the world's resources: "How do we supply energy, especially to the developing world, with carbon emissions? It's a big ticket item!" He says our use of gasses means the planet is heating up quicker than it should. Normally the atmosphere traps energy from the sun to warm the planet. Human use of fossil fuels (coal, oil, natural gas) means the process is speeding up.

This process is not easy to slow down, Bishop Toohey explains: "What we're hearing is that by 2050 carbon emissions should be reduced by 60 -80 per cent. Significant changes are needed in the way we use and consume energy." New ways are needed to make electricity for domestic and industrial use, explains Bishop Toohey. "This is crucial to our style of living and for raising the standard of living in developing countries," he says. Options at the moment include wind and solar power. Ultimately, however, the scientific community says that for the present, "there's no silver bullet solution to this: energy may need to come from several different sources".

Currently, the only energy source which comes close to duplicating the power of fossil fuel is enriched uranium, the source of nuclear energy. "That could be somewhat tricky," he says. Since becoming head of Catholic EarthCare Australia five years ago, Bishop Toohey has genned up on the latest developments. He says: "I try to combine the best scientific opinion with the best theology." So, what does Catholicism have to offer the debate? The short answer is hope.

"We have the Good News of the Gospel, of hope and joy," says Bishop Toohey. "When we join forces with people from other cultures we do it in an open way but with the confidence that we are being led by a higher authority — think of the words of Matthew's Gospel: 'Remember, I am with you always: even to the end of time!'" The input of the Holy Spirit is crucial to enlighten us: "One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is wisdom. We need to pray for wisdom and to allow God to penetrate our hearts and minds to inform our common sense."

Bishop Toohey's perspective is inspired by John Paul II. His call for us all to have an 'ecological conversion' was the drive behind establishing Catholic Earthcare Australia.

"John Paul II said we needed to re-connect and re-evaluate our connection with the natural world. The first step is always prayer. John Paul II said we need to contemplate before we act: the Church has all that to offer. Our tradition has poetry and song, it has the Gospels themselves, it has St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of the environment, it has the writings of St Augustine who said 'the natural world is a book without words teaching us about the wonders of the creator'. We have all this to help us evaluate the planet."

Another factor faith can add to the ecology debate is celebration something missing amid all the hand-wringing. "We need to celebrate beauty, the created order," says Bishop Toohey. "The world is amazing. We have right to be here, we are created in God's image. Some of the stuff I hear 'is a bit' anti-human, about limiting our numbers, that harm to the planet is all man's fault." Instead, "human beings need to celebrate: to look at the natural world and say 'isn't it fantastic! Sometimes fear can take away any joy", says Bishop Toohey who dates his own ecological conversion - "still an ongoing process" — to when he assumed his role as head of Catholic Earthcare Australia.

So what tips can Bishop Toohey offer the ecologically worried British RC? Number one is prayer: "Without prayer, I don't think we can fix this. So the very first thing is to pray for wisdom, courage and generosity of spirit. "Secondly, try your best to be informed. Don't just read the newspapers. Countries like Australia or England have scientific bodies on the environment. But you need to test the science — check that they are politically non-aligned, ask who is saying this? Who's paying them? This needs to be discerned. Their bona fides need to be established. "The third thing to do is to look at the way you live. What about your consumption of material goods and use of light or water? Do you drive your car economically? "Jesus never preached that the way to eternal life was through consumption, which is today's gospel. You have to look at your own lifestyle: if everybody in the world lived the way Australia lived, we'd need ten earths to supply them."

In Australia, Catholic Earthcare has acted as something of a forum for debate and information. Bishop Toohey meets politicians and scientists but also helps concerned mums, dads and schoolteachers access data about what is going on elsewhere in his vast continent. "The structure has acted as a lightning rod really. Toohey's own profound sense of awe at God's creation and the natural world is inspired by his hobby: astronomy.

"I am an amateur astronomer and have been since the age of 13," he says. "Living in cities we don't see the stars and we are not exposed to the wonder of God's creation. We are a bit fixated on our own belly-button. It is a form of madness in a sense. Yet the author of the universe came to this earth."

A God-centred view of the world puts environmental worries into perspective, Toohey concludes. "When you think of the scope and the power of that being who is our ally, and all we have to do is to tack-le climate change, that's nothing," he says. "That's why I liked WWII. He didn't think in postage stamps, he thought in cinema screens: to some extent we need that perspective to walk on this earth."

#

23rd December 2007 *Time's ripe for priests to speak up for animals*

Y OUR correspondents on vegetarianism and the Faith fall wide of the mark to some degree (Letters, The Catholic Times, December 9). First, if we are to feed an increasing world population, is it not a bit daft to give over so much land to produce crops to feed animals? It is a fact that ten vegetarians can be fed off the area of land which will only feed one meat eater.

The meat industry is a huge user of water: give up a daily shower for a year and you will not save the water that a pound of steak uses! Let us also think of the humane choice for vegetarianism. When our ancestors ate meat, the animals had not been carted for endless miles in three tier animal transporters, with the terrified animals defecating on the animals below.

Slaughterhouses were local and the slaughtermen were quite often local butchers who were proud to be able to do a clean humane job. Having been to a slaughterhouse more than once, I am not impressed that this is the case now. And what makes people think we are designed to eat meat? A true animal eater has a short gut: acid saliva and a far more acid stomach than man. We vegetarians are fitter, suffer less from bowel cancer, and statistically live longer. There is a lot of sorting out to do if the animal population is to be drastically reduced: we could start by ending artificial insemination — an affront to the dignity of animals.

I am proud to be a Catholic, a vegetarian and a peaceful member of the animal rights' movement. God made animals, and man is not according them their rightful place in His creation. Fortunately there are some priests who agree with me, but not enough speak up. Let us start with the appointment of a bishop to speak out for animals and the environment, and let it be a bishop with courage and a loud voice.

Mrs Jennifer Potheary, Salisbury, Wiltshire

13th January 2008 * Key is caring for God's creation*

RECENT correspondence in your letters columns would indicate for a greater understanding of animal welfare in a theological and spiritual dimension (Letters, The Catholic Times, December 23); a fascinating subject especially when contrasting the nature of the human person.

The debate on vegetarianism is an interesting one which is not really able to be settled by considering if it is or is not good for you. Many human beings eat meat; Eskimos depend on it, it does them good nutritionally and is not rejected. Carnivorous animals eat meat; their source of nutrition would end if vegetarianism was to be extended to all creatures. Currently one of our biggest arable crops, grass, is converted to usable human food by grazing. This currently is the most efficient way of doing so while still managing difficult land masses and also acts as a natural preservative for winter months.

How we approach the nature of animals is important; they should not be treated humanely as they are not human. They also have no rights. The answer to these problems is found by considering the nature of animals ordained in creation. If animals have rights, the most fundamental right is the right to life; from this all others flow. By logic it would therefore not be ethical to perform euthanasia on an animal and we would have the responsibility of stopping the violation of the right to life by predator animals expressed on their food source. When considering the human person we currently fall quite drastically short of not killing the innocent human being.

The answers lie in Church teaching. The issue is how we care for creation and how we ensure animal welfare. Recognising human creation 'in the image and likeness of God' makes it imperative to follow just moral action — we have to totally discover our responsibility to these issues. This can be done perfectly adequately by correct farming methods and high levels of animal welfare in the meat industry; references in scripture abound. Yes we have a long way to go but the task is not impossible.

By considering scripture, the magisterium, Divine Revelation and how Church in its various community activities deals with these issues, it can be seen that the only way to resolve them is by working in Communion. Christ himself, after the resurrection ate fish, grilled fish indeed. A bishop for the environment has been appointed, Bishop Declan Lang and one platform for debate is the environment sub group of the National Justice and Peace Network; interested parties may like to work in communion with what is already being debated.

Austin P Kirwan, Veterinary Surgeon and Medical Ethicist, Ormskirk, Lanes

27th January 2008 *We must respect His creatures*

T HOSE who have followed the debate on vegetarianism and animal welfare, initiated by two excellent articles by Agneta Sutton (Science, The Catholic Times, November 25 and December 2), may be interested to know what the Pope had to say on the subject.

When, as Cardinal Ratzinger, he was asked if we were allowed to make use of animals and eat them, he replied: "That is a very serious question. At any rate, we can see that they are given into our care, that we cannot just do whatever we want with them. Animals, too, are God's creatures, and even if they do not have the same direct relation to God that man has, they are creatures of His will, creatures we must respect as companions and as important elements in creation.

"As far as whether we are allowed to kill and eat animals, there is a remarkable ordering of matters in Holy Scripture. We can read how, at first, only plants are mentioned as providing food for man. Only after the flood, that is to say, after a new breach had been opened between God and man, are we told that man eats flesh.

"Nonetheless, We should not proceed from this to a kind of sectarian cult of animals. For this too is permitted to man. "He should always maintain his respect for these creatures, but he knows at the same time that he is not forbidden to take food from them.

"Certainly, a sort of industrial use of creatures, so that geese are fed in such a way as to produce as large a liver as possible, or hens live so packed together that they become just caricatures of birds, this degrading of living creatures to a commodity seems to me in fact to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible."

Austin P Irwin in his letter headed 'Key is caring for God's creation' (The Catholic Times, January 13) reminds us that we have to act responsibly, with correct farming methods and high levels of animal welfare. Sentient creatures would not be produced in the degrading way described by the Pope if none of us bought these products.

Those of us who do eat animal products should ensure that it is produced to high standards and one way of doing so is to ensure that it is certified organic to Soil Association standards. In addition to the National Justice and Peace network that Mr Kirwan mentioned, readers may also be interested in Catholic Concern for Animals, which produces a magazine called 'The Ark' in which such issues are debated. Its general secretary is Deborah Jones and the website is www.catholic-animals.org.

Mrs Margaret Harrington, Fareham, Hants

Western Herald

27th November 2007

Veggie climate cure

SIR — With climate change making headlines and many people unsure of what they can do to help, giving up meat has become an increasingly realistic choice. It is certainly an understated fact that farmed animals produce more greenhouse gas emissions (18%) than the world's entire transport system (13.5%). A recent report in The Lancet written by an international team of scientists emphasised the health and environmental benefits of vegetarianism and recognised "reducing demand for meat as the only real option" for tackling the threat that cattle farming presents to environmental stability. The Vegetarian Society has produced a report about how diet impacts on the environment. Why it's Green to Go Vegetarian is available at www.vegsoc.org/environment, or you can call 0161 925 2000 for a free copy of the booklet which explains why vegetarians' meat and fish-free lifestyle reduces their impact on the environment.

Given the recently (and perennially) publicised links between the consumption of red meat and serious health risks the time has never been better to consider a positive lifestyle change.

JOHN M GILHEANY Mackintosh Place, Roath, Cardiff

3rd December 2007

A load of hot air?

SIR - John Gilheaney states (November 27) that farmed animals produce more greenhouse gas emissions (18%) than the world's entire transport system (13.5%).

I would be very interested if he or anyone else could tell me how many cow, sheep and pig emissions would be equivalent to a jumbo jet taking off. At the moment I am half way to vegetarianism, but there is a lot to consider.

He does say to refer to The Lancet. However, as I left school in 1945 at 14 with only credits in mental arithmetic and reading, I am not used to perusing such words of wisdom. Those sort of people lived the life of Riley while I had my nose to the grindstone, grinding out their basic needs.

An aspect I have considered, however, is the fact a field full of swedes is not as picturesque as lambs gambolling, cows patiently chewing the cud, or pigs pushing each other out of the way to get to the trough.

Also, there does seem to be quite a lot of emissions from the tractors during sowing and reaping of these root veg. If there are no animals what will feed the root vegetables? Petrol fumes? We have always used well-rotted manure.

A PHILLIPS, Danygraig Cottages, Cross Inn, Pontyclun, RCT

Go to back page for John's unpublished reply.

The Catholic Herald

21st September 2008

Benedict XVI's new encyclical to call for action on the environment

By Mark Greaves and Edward Pentin

POPE BENEDICT XVI IS to address the environment in his forthcoming social encyclical, a Vatican official has confirmed. The Pope has issued a series of pronouncements over the last few weeks urging people to protect the environment "before it's too late". But news that he will confront the issue in an encyclical will be hailed as a break-through by environmentalists. The document, which is expected "within months", will be the first social encyclical since John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* in 1991. It is intended to mark the 40th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI's groundbreaking document on Catholic social teaching. Benedict XVI drafted the document during his holiday in the mountains of northern Italy. He is expected to draw attention to tax evasion as well as the environment.

Mark Dowd, who presented the Channel 4 documentary *God is Green*, said an encyclical on the environment would be "an extremely welcome development". He said that the Pope's understanding of theology and scripture meant that he was in a "uniquely privileged position" to address environmental issues. "If he came up with some-thing on the environment that was half as incisive as his encyclical on love, that would be an amazing thing," he said. But he said he hoped Benedict XVI would address climate change specifically rather than the environment in general.

The Pontiff has surprised Vatican commentators by talking about green issues repeatedly in his public addresses. At a youth rally in the Italian city of Loreto Benedict XVI called on world leaders to make "courageous decisions" to save the planet "before it's too late". Five days later Benedict XVI offered his support for an international conference in Greenland on protecting the Arctic, and said that "the protection of water resources and attention to climate change are matters of utmost importance for the entire human family". Then, during his three-day trip to Austria, Benedict XVI drew attention to the environment in his homily at Vienna's St Stephen Cathedral when he urged Christians to use Sundays to reflect on environmental problems. Last weekend the Pope struck upon a similar theme, calling for an alliance between "man and the environment".

Editorial Comment - Benedict XVI is challenging us to become truly Catholic

Why has Pope Benedict XVI chosen to follow his landmark apostolic letter liberating the traditional Mass with a social encyclical with an environmental theme? There are two contending explanations, both of which take note of an interesting shift in the Church.

For 30 years or so after the Second Vatican Council it was customary to divide Catholics into liberals and conservatives. This terminology has gradually fallen into disuse as Rome ruled authoritatively on the key disputes between the two camps: on contraception, women priests, liberation theology, the liturgy and the interpretation of Vatican II. But while these terms have fallen out of favour, the divisions they describe remain. Those who once called them-selves liberals might now be described as Fairtrade Catholics. A Fairtrade Catholic believes that the Church's key responsibility is to defend the environment, press for global economic reform in the interests of the world's poor and encourage frugal living. Conservatives, meanwhile, have been replaced by what might be termed Liturgical Catholics. The Liturgical Catholic believes that the Church's primary mission is to lead mankind to the true worship of God, ensuring that Masses are celebrated with the utmost dignity and encouraging Catholics to treasure the liturgical riches of the past 2,000 years.

The first explanation contends that the Pope wants to follow an initiative that dismayed Fairtrade Catholics with one that will fill them with delight. He is motivated by an essentially political desire to appease a disaffected group. The second explanation suggests that Benedict XVI has a deeper motive. By following the apostolic letter with the encyclical the Pope is challenging both Fairtrade and Liturgical Catholics to embrace the fullness of the faith. During a July meeting with Italian priests, the Pope said that Catholicism can be described, somewhat simplistically, as the religion of "the great *et et*" in other words, as a faith that insists on "both and", rather than "either or". Tellingly, he added: "I would simply like to commit myself to the great Catholic synthesis, to this *et et*; to be truly human. And each person, in accordance with his or her own gifts and charism, should not only love the earth and the beautiful things the Lord has given us, but also be grateful because God's light shines on earth and bathes everything in splendour and beauty."

For Benedict XVI it makes no sense to be either a Fairtrade Catholic or a Liturgical Catholic. We are called both to care for this world and to reverently worship the Lord who made it. Either the apostolic letter or the social encyclical may not be entirely to our taste. But if we are truly to be Catholic we should be prepared to receive both with joy.

#

2nd November 2007

Benedict XVI must lead the 'ecological conversion'*The Pope is uniquely placed to tackle the challenge of man-made climate change, says Mark Dowd*

For some weeks now we have been reading reports about Pope Benedict's increasingly urgent appeals for mankind to act on the environment "before it is too late", to quote his precise words during his recent visit to Austria. There was much talk of him devoting his second encyclical to the importance of man's right relation with the natural world and to setting out a "theology of creation". Recent reports suggest that the next papal encyclical is about salvation through hope, but rumours persist that Benedict XVI will soon release a major document on environmental matters. Such a move is essential to make it absolutely clear that the Holy See sees climate change for what it is: the biggest threat that humanity has ever faced.

Sadly, we have recently had mixed signals from Rome. Soon after the Vatican confirmed it intended to become a carbon-neutral state we heard that at the Church's own global warming summit a large amount of time was given over to the tiny, minority who still assert that man-made climate change is a myth.

If world CO₂ emissions need to peak and then be sharply reduced after 2015, we can't afford to be treating this issue as a matter of fascinating academic debate. Climate change is here. It is real. It is already happening. So what difference would an encyclical make and what are the themes it should address?

Earlier this year I unearthed some alarming quotations from the period before the Industrial Revolution while preparing for the Channel 4 film, *God Is Green*. Descartes referred to man as "Lord and possessor of nature", while Francis Bacon talked of "putting nature on the rack and extracting her secrets". The optimism of an early scientific rationalism took root.

This came on the back of centuries of "Dominion theology", which was rooted in a distorted view of Genesis. When man is given "dominion" over the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, the original Hebrew word is a technical term carrying a strong sense of responsibility to "nurture" or "tend" (the same root is present in the story of Cain and Abel with the question: "Am I my brother's keeper?")

In large parts of the West, humanity began to see itself as detached from the web of nature rather than as an important and integrated part of it. The natural world was a playground full of goodies and resources for us to plunder. This would happen, of course, at no cost to us. Today's world is littered with evidence of these chickens coming home to roost. Figures compiled by groups such as the World Wildlife Fund show that the so-called "background rate" of the elimination of plants and animal species is now running at record levels.

The pity is that we have lost so much time. Eco-warriors and the leaders of organised religions have for decades been staring at one another across a vast chasm on this issue. Environmentalists were largely dismissed as suspect. They were, at best, well-meaning pantheists or animists who hated humanity and actually worshipped the earth as a false god. On the other side, religious monotheists were seen as apologists for the worst excesses of global capitalism, justifying man's actions with references to Psalm 8: "You have made him little less than a god... you have placed all creation under his feet."

There were in fact voices addressing the subject from within the Catholic tradition. The former Dominican Matthew Fox's *Original Blessing* (1983) broke new ground in the early 1980s with its call for man to tread lightly on the planet and usher in a new era of "creation spirituality". Fox and others, like Thomas Berry in his 1988 work *The Dream of the Earth*, were deemed mavericks by traditionalists who remained suspicious of whether their works represented an authentically Christian vision of creation.

Yet it is not as if they were the lone voices during this period. Far from it. The more one looks, the more it is apparent that John Paul II adopted a distinctly prophetic tone in parts of his encyclicals, including *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) and *Centesimus Annus* (1991). In *Evangelium Vitae* in 1995, he wrote: "Nature itself, from being 'mater' is now reduced to being 'matter' and is subject to every kind of manipulation. This is the direction in which a certain technical and scientific way of thinking appears to be leading when it rejects the very idea that there is a truth in creation which must be acknowledged or a plan of God for life which must be respected."

The problem is that these key messages of Catholic teaching get lost in the fog. Often they are wonderful gems (such as the late pope's call for humanity to undergo an "ecological conversion") that get buried in encyclical with other overarching themes. A papal document on creation and nothing else at a time when the world is pining for clear leadership would be truly groundbreaking.

The challenge is how to ground all this in a specifically Christian vision that ties in creation with redemption. Christ is the head of the Church and is bearer of a covenant relationship between God, human beings and all creation. What does this mean for us in the 21st century? As we have seen from his masterful *Jesus of Nazareth*, the Holy Father is uniquely placed to address his formidable theological powers to this matter in a way that avoids the hazards of a woolly de-Christianised paganism. To gain maximum impact, such a work would need to be introduced in an imaginative way. Perhaps the Holy Father could stand, flanked by other world faith leaders, in one of the parts of the world most vulnerable to rising sea levels. Imagine if the world's attention were captured even half as much for this event as it was in September 2006 for the infamous Regensburg address.

I mention other faiths because the dangers of climate change do not distinguish between Catholic and Protestant, Hindu and Muslim. There is huge inter-faith potential in this domain. Lying dormant in many of the world's great religious traditions are messages of profound relevance which scream out for resuscitation. How many Muslims, for example, know that there are 261 derivative references to *khalq*, the Arabic word for "creation" in their holy book and that the world is referred to as God's *ayat*, or "miraculous sign"? Do they know that man is called to be *khalifa*, or "steward of creation"?

Furthermore, as the young seem increasingly uninterested in organised religion, what better message to offer to the leaders of the future? The Church can say to them that, while democratic leaders are afraid to make unpopular decisions, she is able to articulate their concerns. The theologian Bernard Lonergan once wrote: "The Church often arrives a little breathless and a little late." Let us hope and pray that soon, very soon, Benedict XVI is about to prove that perception wrong. There really is no time to lose.

Mark Dowd is a journalist and broadcaster

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9th November 2007

Imaginative ways From Isabella Rodriguez

SIR — It was interesting to read the article (November 2) by Mark Dowd. In it he invites the Pope to "address his formidable theological powers" to the question of man-made climate change and suggests the eventual publication "be introduced in an imaginative way... perhaps the Holy Father could stand, flanked by other world leaders, in one of the parts of the world most vulnerable to rising sea levels". This is a good idea.

However, it is important to recognise the imaginative ways the Pope has already adopted in his concern to get this message across. For example, in July the Pontifical Council for Culture staged concert to raise awareness of the crisis. The council chose a London boys choir, in which my two sons sing, to perform new choral works that were beamed around the world under the Live Earth banner.

Yours faithfully, **ISABELLA RODRIGUEZ London W3**

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14th December 2007

Oldies don't have a carbon footprint by Mary Kenny

Since even the Holy Father is urging us all to "go green", I suppose it can only be a matter of time before new prohibitions are set on our ecological conduct. But surely those of us over 60 should be exempted from feeling guilty on green grounds? After all, we, in our youth, were commendably "green" insofar as prudently using the earth's resources. We had to be. We had the practice of one bath a week — routine in Catholic boarding schools in the 1950s and 60s, and true in most homes, too.

Heating was rationed both for economy and because too much comfort "made you soft". We huddled round turf or coal fires, and took a hot water bottle to bed. No central heating for us! We walked to school, took the bus, and used our bikes. We sold and recycled our second-hand schoolbooks. Clothes were passed down through families: and fabrics were mended and repaired rather than thrown away.

Our mothers and aunts would utter prudent little mottos such as "Waste not, want not", or more dolefully, "Wanton Waste Makes Woeful Want". Rationing only ceased in Britain in 1951. Despite her agricultural basis, some rationing also obtained in Ireland.

We were despatched to do the, family shopping, purchasing sugar in rough brown paper; butter was cut on the slab; rashers of bacon were sliced before our eyes; bullseyes and gobstopper sweets were sold naked. No wasteful wrapping then. The milkman delivered milk by horse and cart, and most ecologically, people requested the horse's manure to use on their garden roses. We took our lemonade bottles back to the shop and received three pence - or was it a penny? — on each return.

If and when we went abroad, we travelled (with great excitement) by bus, train, and boat. If we got to the Continent, we hitch-hiked everywhere. In short, we have paid our dues in our austere childhood and youth. We didn't cause the carbon footprint problem.

Surely we deserve an exemption from the green ordinances coming our way? Surely we shouldn't face the same penalties as those who grew up with three cars in the family drive, everything packaged twice, and cheap flights criss-crossing the skies?

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11th January 2008 Stop moralising about climate change, urges Australian cardinal

BY SIMON CALDWELL

A RESPECTED Australian cardinal has warned Christian leaders against uncritically accepting the radical, green agenda. Cardinal George Pell, the Archbishop of Sydney, said he was deeply sceptical about claims that man-made emissions were melting the ice caps and were about to bring about a wave of unprecedented climatic natural disasters.

He accused "radical environmentalists" of "moralising their own agenda and imposing it on people through fear". Then, in a rebuke to the many clerics who have publicly supported their claims, he said: "They don't need Church leaders to help them with this. Church leaders in particular should be allergic to this kind of nonsense."

In possibly the most hard-hitting attack on the green movement by any Catholic leader the cardinal went on to compare the environmental movement to a form of paganism, saying many of its claims were insufficiently rooted in reliable scientific evidence.

He said: "In the past pagans sacrificed animals and even humans in vain attempts to placate capricious and cruel gods. Today they demand a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions." He added: "It is true that some of the more hysterical and extreme claims about global warming appear symptomatic of a pagan emptiness, of a western fear when confronted by the immense and basically uncontrollable forces of nature, "Years ago I was struck by the fears middle-class kids without religion had about, nuclear war. It was almost an obsession with a few of them: It's almost as though people without religion, who don't belong to any oldie great religious traditions, have got to be frightened of something."

His comments, reported in Catholic World Report, stand in stark contrast to the messages of many Christian leaders who have embraced environmentalism. Among them is the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams, who in a New Year message stressed his concern for the environment and the moral necessity of protecting it. A substantial number of Catholic bishops and members of religious orders have also joined the green movement and last year the Vatican hosted a conference on climate change.

In his interview Cardinal Pell said it was right that people behaved as responsible custodians of God's creation but he criticised the "herd-like mentality" which has united many in the media, politics, the Church and the general public in accepting "wilder claims about man-made climate change as if they constituted a new religion". "These days for any public figure to question the basis of what amounts to a green fundamentalist faith is tantamount to heresy," he said.

"Scientific debate is not decided by any changing consensus, even if it is endorsed by political parties and public opinion," he continued. "Climate change both up and down has been occurring, probably since earth first had a climate. "Science is a process of experimentation, debate and respect for evidence. Often it is dealing with uncertainties rather than certainties, and so its forecasts and predictions can be spectacularly wrong. We must not ignore evidence that doesn't suit our cause."

In support of his argument, Cardinal Pell cited a study reported in the American Scientist magazine which revealed that radiation from the sun, and not greenhouse gases, was responsible for melting a glacier on Mount Kilimanjaro. He also said that while the earth's atmospheric temperatures had risen slightly in the last century, they had also gone up on Mars, where there were no man-made emissions.

Cardinal Pell is one of the Church's most well-known leaders and has won respect for his competence as a bishop, his courageous defence of Catholic orthodoxy and his intellectual rigour as a theologian.

His remarks came a week after Pope Benedict appeared to distance himself from the ideology of parts of the environmental movement. In his message for World Peace Day last week the Pontiff said that humanity was "rightly concerned about the ecological balance of tomorrow". But he added: "It is important for assessments in this regard to be carried out prudently, in dialogue with experts and people of wisdom, uninhibited by ideological pressure to draw hasty conclusions, and above all with the aim of reaching agreement on a model of sustainable development capable of ensuring the well-being of all while respecting environmental balances."

Jesuit Fr Federico Lombardi, the Pope's spokesman, explained that Benedict XVI sought to invite dialogue and serious scientific study of the problems without "ideological escalation". However, Cardinal Pell's intervention was severely criticised by environmental campaigners within the Church. Fr Sean McDonagh, a Dublin-based priest and author on climate change, said the cardinal's comments were "grossly irresponsible".

Editorial Comment - Cardinal Pell the dissenter

Cardinal Pell is the last person you might suspect of dissenting from orthodoxy. Unless, of course, the orthodoxy in question is that of the global environmental movement. In an interview this week Australia's leading churchman likened environmentalism to a hysterical form of neo-paganism. Saying he was "sceptical about extravagant claims of impending man-made climatic catastrophes", the cardinal also lambasted the "herd-like mentality" that prevailed in Australia on the issue.

He certainly seems to be going against the prevailing scientific consensus. Whatever his claims about Antarctica cooling or world temperatures peaking in 1998, all the major studies show that the earth's climate is not only getting warmer, but more violent and extreme, and that this is almost certainly man-made. Certainly there are inaccuracies, as Cardinal Pell pointed out, in such works as Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. But there is also a lot of truth in there as well. But even if the cardinal is mistaken (and it is just possible he might not be) he is certainly right to bring up the dangers of hysteria and herd behaviour. The Government's attempts to broad-cast Al Gore's documentary to every school pupil in the country, despite its nine "significant errors", had a sinister air to it. Likewise the green propaganda, especially that directed at children, has a rather Soviet

feel to it. On the subject of paganism, Cardinal Pell is certainly right: ever since the Gaia Movement in the 1960s there has been a significant neo-pagan Mother Earth-worshipping element within the green movement which is both anti-God and anti-man.

Human history is littered with examples of our species sleep-walking to disaster because of the madness of crowds. It is vital to have dissenting, intelligent voices like Cardinal Pell around. He is genuinely convinced that the world is not warming and he has every right to try to persuade others of this belief. But if he wants to enjoy Australian summers in the future he may need to invest in some Factor 50 suncream. #

18th January 2008 Bishops challenged to set free-range example By Ed West

A CATHOLIC group is leading a campaign to make every diocese in England and Wales boycott battery farming. Catholic Concern for Animals is writing to all the bishops in England and Wales requesting that their dioceses go free range in all their events.

The campaign comes on the back of the crusade by celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver to promote free-range eggs and poultry. In a letter sent to the bishops, the group wrote: "To show that the Church leads the way in matters of compassion, would you consider promoting your diocese as a 'free-range' user, and ask that all catering within the diocese parish events, presbytery dining, school and college dinners, conference catering, etc, should make use only of free-range products?" "This would be appreciated – of course, by the creatures themselves, but also by very many within and outside the Church as a significant and humane course of action."

Before he became Pope, Benedict XVI spoke out against battery farming. He wrote: "Industrial use of creatures, so that... hens live so packed together that they become just caricatures of birds, this degrading of living creatures to a commodity seems to me in fact to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible." #

From 'Wing of Friendship' Summer 2007

Just For Laughs

And God created pets

A newly discovered chapter in the Book of Genesis has provided the answer to 'Where do pets come from?'

Adam said, 'Lord, when I was in the garden, you walked with me every day. Now I do not see you any more. I am lonesome here and it is difficult for me to remember how much you love me.' And God said 'No problem. I will create a companion for you that will be with you forever and who will be a reflection of my love for you so that you will love me even when you cannot see me. Regardless of how selfish or childish or unlovable you may be, this new companion will accept you as you are and will love you as I do, in spite of yourself.' And God created a new animal to be a companion for Adam. And it was a good animal. And God was pleased. And the new animal was pleased to be with Adam and it wagged its tail. And Adam said, 'Lord, I have already named all the animals in the Kingdom and I cannot think of a name for this new animal.' And God said, 'No problem. Because I have created this new animal to be a reflection of my love for you his name will be a reflection of my own name, and you will call him Dog.'

And Dog lived with Adam and was a companion to him and loved him. And Adam was comforted. And God was pleased. And Dog was content and wagged his tail. After a while, it came to pass that Adam's guardian angel came to the Lord and said, 'Lord, Adam has become filled with pride. He struts and preens like a peacock and he believes he is worthy of adoration. Dog has indeed taught him that he is loved, but perhaps too well.' And the Lord said, 'No problem. I will create for him a companion who will be with him forever and who will see him as he is. The companion will remind him of his limitations, so he will know that he is not always worthy of adoration.'

And God created Cat to be a companion to Adam. And Cat would not obey Adam. And when Adam gazed into Cat's eyes, he was reminded that he was not the Supreme Being. And Adam learned humility. And God was pleased. And Adam was greatly improved. And Dog was happy. And Cat didn't care one way or the other.

Submitted by John W. Brown Jr

The Universe

2nd September 2007

A simpler life can help prevent cancer By Maureen Mullally

CANCER is probably the most dreaded disease of all. Cancer charities are popular recipients of our generosity and much money has been poured into research into the problems, both from government and charitable sources. In spite of that, we have statistics revealing that cancer, in all its forms, is on the increase. The incidence of malignant melanoma – skin cancer in ordinary language – for example, rose between 1995 and 2004 by over 43 per cent. Warnings that exposure to sun can cause this have been largely ignored by those of us devoted to the acquisition of what is imagined to be a healthy and fashionable tan. But this is far from being the only example of the increase of cases for different types of cancer. Figures for prostate cancer cases over the same period soared by almost 40 per cent, liver cancer by 33.4 per cent, oral cancers and cancer of the uterus by over 20 per cent.

Experts anticipate that the statistics since 2004 are likely to show that the growth in these cases has continued. One sombre prediction was: "The figures can only get worse." Why should this be, when so much money and so much skill are being devoted to getting the disease under control? The unpalatable answer which we must all face is that professionals are laying the blame squarely on our chosen lifestyles. As exemplified by the cause for the rise in skin cancer diagnosis, we all tend to discount advice which potentially interferes with the lives we like to lead.

A YouGov survey of 2,000 adults found that 47 per cent of them were unaware that eating a lot of junk food, becoming overweight and drinking alcohol to excess could put them at risk of developing cancer. Dr Greg Martin of World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF), which commissioned the poll, said: "It really is a shame that so many people are not aware enough about how they can re-duce their cancer risk. "The fact that diet, weight and physical activity are closely linked to cancer has been well-known in the science community for many years. `But unfortunately the message has not been getting through to the public, and because people do not know the facts many are dying unnecessarily. "This is really frustrating. By making a few small changes to their lifestyle, people can make a real difference to their cancer risk, and also for their long-term quality of life."

Lucie Galice, general manager of WCRF, said: "As a charity we are committed to spreading the message that healthy eating, physical activity and weight management can reduce cancer risk, but the results of our survey show all too clearly that there is still a long way to go. It is a re-minder that both the public sector and the voluntary sector need to do better at informing the public."

Millions all over the world are dying from hunger. - Yet we, in the privileged and wealthy societies, are eating, drinking and lazing our way to avoidable death. It is a shocking and fairly damning indictment, particularly if you happen to be a Christian. Coincidentally, Father General of the Jesuits, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, is promoting a campaign based on the maxim; `Live simply so that others may live.' "How do we get this principle of justice through love down to the level of reality, the reality of our daily lives?" he asks.

His answer is that we should cultivate in our daily lives a firm determination to live more simply, as individuals, as families, as social groups, and so at least slow down, the expanding spiral of social competition, to inspire people "who will resolutely set themselves against the tide of our consumer society". If this produces surplus income, "let it be given to those for whom the necessities of life are still luxuries beyond their reach." If we put his wise and compassionate counsel into practice, we would incidentally be living healthier lives and reducing cancer risks. Isn't it shamefully obvious that Father Peter-Hans is offering the real solution to the insidious spread, of the disease in our society? #

11th November 2007

Fr Sean McDonagh SSC

LAST week I wrote that a German energy watch group had judged that global `peak oil' supplies were reached in 2006. One of the authors, Mr Schindler, argued that a decline in fossil fuel supplies will influence almost every aspect of our daily lives. Colin Campbell, the founder of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas (ASPO), agrees with this analysis. He argues that a plentiful supply of oil, which has underpinned the world economy for the past 150 years, will soon start to decline, with severe consequences for business and, one might add, for every other aspect of life as well.

Campbell puts it graphically when he claimed that today's oil supply is the equivalent of 22 billion slaves working 24 hours a day. This has led to the rapid expansion of transport, industry, trade and an explosion in population levels. Some people believe that transport, and especially suburban living, will be the first casualty of peak oil. In fact, agriculture, food production and distribution will be the areas most affected when oil becomes scarce.

Modern agriculture depends for its success on petrochemicals in the form of inorganic nitrogen, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and diesel for the farm machinery, all of which are derived from oil. I saw the impact of the `green revolution' in the Philippines in the 1960s and 1970s. Scientists bred hybrid varieties of rice that required massive amounts of water and chemical fertilisers, especially nitrogen.

In many areas of the world, hybrid corn, rice and wheat have swept away the traditional varieties which were used by previous generations. The new varieties certainly delivered more grain for the first few years, but the social and environmental costs were huge, especially when farmers were forced to opt for the so-called "efficiencies" of factory farming. Communities were decimated as subsistence farmers lost their land and joined the ranks of those already living in the misery of urban shanty towns.

The energy impact of petrochemical agriculture is massive. Writing in Harper's Magazine in February 2004, Richard Manning writes that every single calorie we eat is backed by at least one calorie of oil, though it is often more like 10. In 1940, the average farm in the United States produced 2.3 calories of food energy for every calorie of fossil energy it used. Much of the nitrogen runs off the land and creates major ecological problems in rivers, lakes and even as far as the oceans.

The use of fossil fuel doesn't end with the growing crops. Large amounts of energy are used by agricultural equipment, through ploughing, spraying, harvesting the crops and processing the food. Manning claims that the food processing industry in the United States uses about 10 calories of fossil fuel energy for every calorie of food energy it produces. This does not include the fossil fuel used by large trucks as they deliver the food to shopping centres, nor the fuel the customers burn driving out to shopping malls to buy the food.

Switching our cars to ethanol will not help very much, either. Even official figures from the US Department of Agriculture acknowledge that it takes a gallon of fossil fuel to produce a gallon and a quart of ethanol. When we move from eating green matter in the form of cereals, vegetables and root crops to eating poultry and animal meat, the fossil fuel component in our food jumps dramatically, especially if the cattle or pigs are grain fed and held in pens where they will need regular medicine to control the spread of disease. Manning claims that 35 calories of fossil fuel are required to produce a calorie of beef. The figure for pig meat is even higher; 68 calories of fossil fuel energy is needed to produce a single calorie of pork.

The tragedy in recent years is that more and more countries are copying the efficient production methods of US agriculture. According to David Pimentel, Mexico fed five per cent of its grain to animals in the 1960s; today, the figure is 45 per cent. In China, farmers are currently feeding 26 per cent of their grain to animals. This profligate waste of resources will come to an end as oil supplies diminish. Humans were eating a varied diet for over 100,000 years before the petrochemical era. However, the global food supply is now so dependent on petrochemicals that we will find it difficult to grow food when the oil wells run dry unless there is a major investment in organic agriculture within the next few years. Otherwise, the human community could be facing the possibility of a massive disruption in food production, resulting in mass hunger and starvation. #

2nd December 2007

Fr Sean McDonagh SSC

HOW often have you heard a sermon or read an article that emphasised the importance of the natural world in the life of Jesus? Yet, when we begin to look at the gospels we see that nature played a crucial role in his life. At his birth, Luke tells us that he was laid in a manger, because there was no place for Mary and Joseph in the inn (Luke . 2: 7). Mary, Joseph, the animals and straw surrounded Jesus at his birth. The first human beings to greet him were the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night (Luke. 2.8). The love which Mary and Joseph had for Jesus and the helplessness and total dependence of the infant Jesus on his parents captures our imagination.

It was St. Francis of Assisi, the great lover of all creation, who graphically portrayed this in the first Christmas crib which appeared in Greccio in 1223. Thomas of Celano wrote: "It had, indeed, been the intention of Francis, by concrete representations of the manger-crib, the hay, the live animals, and the child-image, to remind all of the pitiably harsh circumstances of the birth of the Son of God. In the crib, we can see that Jesus' hands are spread out in a gesture of love for us and all creation."

From the beginning of his life, Jesus had first-hand contact with nature. The importance of nature is central to St. Mark's gospel, even though he does not have an infancy gospel. His gospel begins with the Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness where wild beasts and angels looked after him (Mark. 1:12 -13). It was during his sojourn in the desert that Jesus came to accept and appreciate the messianic ministry he was called to embrace. In order to be fully open to his call, Jesus forsook the company of people and spent time with wild animals in the wilderness. He regularly returned to the hills to pray and commune with the Father, especially before making important decisions like choosing the twelve disciples (Luke. b: 12).

It might seem strange to us, whose religious ceremonies are mostly performed in buildings, that Jesus' ministry was not so much carried out in synagogues or the temple, but in the cathedral of nature. In Matthew's gospel, the beatitudes and subsequent teachings are delivered on a mountain (Matthew. 5:1 – 7: 29). Matthew is, of course, presenting Jesus' moral teaching in the larger Jewish context. Jesus' teaching complements and fulfils the teaching given to Moses at Mount Sinai.

Many of the parables of Jesus were centred on nature. To illustrate how different people respond to the gospel message, he told the Parable of the Sower. "Imagine a sower going out to sow... some fell on the edge of the path... others fell among thorns. And the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crops, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Listen, anyone who has ears," (Matthew.

13: 4 -9). One could easily draw parallels between this parable and the way people today are responding to contemporary ecological challenges.

Jesus displayed an appreciative and contemplative attitude which, of course, was rooted in God's love for all creatures. "Think of the ravens. They neither sow or reap; they have no storehouses and no barns; yet God feeds them," (Luke 12: 24). The gospels warn about the urge to continually accumulate more and more goods. "God will provide for our legitimate needs; are you not worth more than the birds?" (Luke. 12: 24).

In Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation, Pope John Paul II saw the importance of changing our lifestyles, especially in the affluent world. In many parts of the world, society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause.

Why not avoid getting sucked into the consumerist tread mill this Christmas? Instead, you might consider giving a gift of an environmental magazine to your friends. I would recommend The Green Christian, published by Christian-Ecology Link. The website www.christian-ecology.org.uk is a mine of information on ecological theology and prayers. It also gives practical direction on how to live more lightly on the earth. In Ireland, I would suggest The Local Planet. This publication carries a variety of information on ecological issues. The editorial team is based at Fivalee, Birr, Co. Offaly and the website is www.localplanet.ie. #

'16th December 2007

*** Fr Sean McDonagh SSC***

BEGAN my column two weeks ago by asking how often do we hear or read about the importance of nature in the life of Jesus? I will return to that theme this week. It is clear from reading the gospels that Jesus' thoughts were full of images from nature, as his teaching was regularly interspersed with references to it. In trying to encourage his disciples to trust in God's providence and avoid worrying about the future, Jesus turns to nature for examples: "Think of the flowers; they never have to spin or weave; yet, I assure you, not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these. "Now if that is how God clothes the grass in the field which is there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, how much more will he look after you, you men (women) of little faith," (Luke 12:27). In St Matthew's gospel, Jesus uses the same image and adds one about the well-being of birds: "Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they are?" (Matt 6:26).

Jesus is not setting out in either of the above instances to denigrate and dismiss the natural world. What he is saying is that the love of God, which can be seen in his care for creatures, is even more abundantly available to humankind. This guarantee of God's love should banish all fear and worry from our lives. St Mark presents Jesus as one who is powerful in the words which he speaks and the deeds which he performs. He is Lord of creation and can calm the turbulent waves with one word and gesture. "As the disciples crossed over Lake Galilee, Jesus was in the stern of the boat asleep. Suddenly, an unexpected storm blew up. The disciples panicked and were afraid that they might drown. They woke Jesus and complained, 'Master, do you not care? We are going down!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And the wind dropped, and all was calm again... They were filled with awe and said to one another, 'Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him' (Mark 4:37-41).

Jesus' healing ministry is a crucial dimension of his life. It touched the lives of everyone who met him. At the beginning of Mark's gospel, we see Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law (Mark. 1: 29-31). This followed his healing of the leper who had faith in Jesus to cure him (Mark I: 40-45) and, finally, the paralytic man who had to be lowered down through the roof (Mark 2:1-12). Healing is also at the heart of Luke's gospel. In Luke 13: 10-17, he cured the woman who had been stooped for many years. This healing drew criticism from the synagogue official but all the people were overjoyed at the wonders he worked. Apart from curing individuals or groups, each healing in the gospel has a deeper sign value. By his acts of healing, Jesus was challenging many of the deepest social, cultural and religious prejudices of society at the time. He linked his healing ministry to the coming of the Kingdom of God by attempting to sow the seed of healing within the community. He was encouraging and challenging people to open themselves to the transforming power of God's compassion, graciousness and love and to share that with others.

This healing action of Jesus is as necessary today as it was 2,000 years ago. So many societies in our contemporary world are divided by conflicting cultural values, racism, open conflict, abortion, appalling levels of hunger, malnutrition and religious intolerance. In addition to problems in the human community, the well being of the planet is now also at stake. In re-cent decades, the natural world has been ruthlessly exploited and important habitats and ecosystems have been destroyed. This generation is witnessing the sixth largest extinction of species since life began about 3.7 billion years ago. Each year, various species are being forced over the precipice of extinction.

The healing ministry of the Church must address complex conflicts within the human community. Because the Church is pro-life, it should also give a lead in defending and protecting God's creation. Hopefully, healing the natural world will have a prominent place in the public expression of the Sacrament of Reconciliation which will be celebrated in parishes throughout these islands during Advent. #

27th January 2008**An ethical choice won't cost you the earth**

MUCH has been made over the last few weeks about Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's campaign for free-range eggs and chickens and the 'Chicken Out' campaign. Mr Fearnley-Whittingstall has spent a lot of time rearing his own birds – half in battery conditions and half free range – for the latest Channel 4 programme. In addition to this, he encouraged and supported a group of people in his home town of Axminster to also rear their own brood to see their journey from chick to table. This duly happened and there were tears when finally the time came for the chucks to meet their maker.

Later on in the final programme however, Mr Fearnley-Whittingstall, while wandering around his local supermarket to check on free range progress, caught one of his group buying the value two-for-£5 chickens. She was embarrassed, but it was embarrassment at being caught rather than for what she did. I admit it is hard for people on low incomes to afford free-range and better-reared meat and meat by-products, but what about everyone else? Some could argue that it is money management to blame here rather than lack of adequate funds for humanely farmed animal products.

Ultimately, the choice of food we buy and give to our families directly affects British farmers and the future really is at stake. Poultry farmers get just 3p per chicken sold yet the super-markets take much more. The price it costs to shear a sheep often isn't covered by the sale of the fleece itself. Dairy farmers are also having a rough ride, with the white stuff selling for less than 30p per litre at the farm gate.

It is well documented that the average housewife goes to the supermarket and selects the best her purse can afford. If this means chickens get treated badly, or that the beef she buys is imported from South America, then what can she do about it?

This problem is addressed in Pope John XXIII's Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* of 1961: "While it is true that farm produce is mainly intended for the satisfaction of man's primary needs, and the price should therefore be within the means of all consumers, this cannot be used as an argument for keeping a section of the population – farm workers – in a permanent state of economic and social inferiority, depriving them of the wherewithal for a decent standard of living."

The truth is that nearly 50 years on from Pope John's words, our buying habits are depriving many farmers of a decent standard of living. It is all very well for non-farmers to say 'but farmers are rich in assets', but what use is 500 acres of land, for example, if they can't earn a living off it? Do we really want to get to the stage where we import all foodstuffs from abroad?

While I worry that since Jamie's School Dinners, celebrity chefs are becoming something of a cliché when it comes to campaigning about food and produce, I nevertheless applaud them for using their public position for good. What can we do then? I think, if you can afford to buy free-range then do so. If you can afford to buy local meat and other produce then do so. If nothing else, the likes of Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall have made us think about how food arrives on our plates.

The only way supermarkets will change the way they buy produce is if people stop buying it. Try and use local butchers and local greengrocers and ask them where they are buying their stock from. Last week The Universe reported that Catholic Concern for Animals was writing to all the bishops in England and Wales to get them to promote free-range products in their dioceses. Readers could also write to lend their support or even write to MPs. As with every cause that is worthy of attention, those small steps made by everyone can lead to big changes overall.

#

3rd February 2008**Real ethical choice is vegetarianism**

THE famous 'animal theologian' and Anglican-Rev Professor, Andrew Linzey, has often invoked the adage that animal rights advocates may be welfarists that really mean it! It was an unavoidable consideration which seemed to linger whilst reading the feature on factory farming that appeared in The Universe of January 27 ("An ethical choice won't cost you the earth") by Emma Clancy. There was a substantial implication that Catholics bear a moral duty to support industries that profit from the rearing, killing and consumption of animals: Yet such an article is to be welcomed in that it takes the whole issue of 'ethical choice' to an important and genuine crux.

Ms Clancy states: "Ultimately the choice of food we buy affects British farmers and the future really is at stake". Those who peddle slaughterhouse products should find little favour among the spiritual. There is no reason for an article on ethical dietary to blithely ignore the vegetarian alternative to cheap factory-farmed, or expensively produced, organic animal flesh. It is indeed sad that Catholic bishops should have to be dragged towards civilised diocesan policy on cruel systems of animal confinement in the wake of practical concern from celebrity chefs.

Andrew Linzey has estimated that there are now more practising vegetarians in Britain than there are Catholic worshippers. One wonders how many may have thrown Christianity to the four winds because of jaded episcopal eulogies over man's divine image; to the detriment of every sentient-being that theology so often exploits.

There is far more to the manifestation of divine qualities than mere physical appearance which should be obvious from the soaring criminal population in Western society,

Jahn Gilheany, Received via email

Church of England Newspaper

21st September 2007

A different perspective on animal welfare

Sir, Living in Africa puts animal welfare in a very different light (article, Putting Animal Rights Back on the Agenda, August 31 See *WTCPS September 2007*). The animals here actually kill and eat each other. Likewise, most people here are struggling to survive, and the attitude towards animals is also very much kill and eat, if edible. I love animals, but is it possible we can be too precious about them in the UK?

Human beings were not created to be vegans. When the Donkey Shelter Charity receives more money than many children's charities there is something wrong. Often animal welfare activists pursue their cause to avoid dealing with human-inflicted pain in their own broken lives. For the church there is a danger that Animals Rights is just another cultural bandwagon to jump onto to appear fashionable, whilst avoiding the fact the answer to society's problems is not being nice to animals, but dying to our selfish, sinful selves.

It's also easy for a 'townie' to have swipe at game-reared pheasants, when in fact game estates are only farms in the countryside that actually actively encourage wildlife. Why not mention the release of mink by animal rights lobby, which has had a long lasting destructive effect on wildlife in the UK? I wonder why?

The Rev Ulric Gerry, Abuja, Nigeria

28th September 2007

***The Christian responsibility towards the *
animal kingdom in today's world**

Sir, I was shocked and appalled by the letter from the Rev Ulric Gerry following my article about animal welfare (August 31). Nowhere did I suggest that children in Africa are not of the highest- importance. In fact, animal welfare and concern for human beings has always been linked: William Wilberforce campaigned for the abolition of the slave trade whilst simultaneously being a founding member of the RSPCA. Gandhi, who no doubt witnessed terrible poverty and those 'struggling to survive', famously said that 'we can judge the moral progress of a nation by its treatment of animals.'

The Rev Ulric Gerry is sadly factually incorrect regarding his comments on game-reared pheasants. The birds are reared in battery-style conditions and simply released to be shot. The farms do not 'actively encourage wildlife' but instead employ many methods to eliminate wildlife. Snares and traps are set to catch foxes and birds of prey. Since these are indiscriminate, any animal (including protected species and pets) can be caught up in them meaning game farms are contributing to a cycle of suffering and death in the countryside. It is not about a 'townie' having a 'swipe', but about pain inflicted on sentient beings.

I fail to understand why the Rev Ulric Gerry is so opposed to my article. All I was suggesting is that, as Christians, we ought to be treating all God's creatures with compassion. The bible itself points to such a future in Isaiah 11:6f and Romans 8:28.

Louise Clark, Communications Officer League against Cruel Sports

Sir, With reference to the letter from the Rev Ulric Gerry (September 21) I strongly disagree with nearly everything he says! I believe that God has enough love for all his creation — human beings (both poor and not so poor), his animal kingdom and indeed this beautiful universe that he created. We may, as humans have been given a special place in his world but that special position means that we have a special responsibility to be good stewards. With regard to our care for his animal kingdom, sadly we are doing rather a poor job.

Masterpieces of his creation such as the tiger, the rhino and many species of whale are threatened with extinction and we seem to view many domesticated animals — particularly those we keep for food, as little more than 'objects' to use as we think fit.

Yes, Mr Gerry, animals in Africa do kill each other for food — funnily enough they do here in the UK as well! Animals however tend to kill what is needed to survive — animals in the wild do not suffer from problems of obesity due to over-indulgence and the animals they hunt have had a quality life in the wild rather than one of incarceration in a factory farm.

The article by Louise Clark (August 31) discussed the link between cruelty to animals and violent behaviour in human beings. This link needs to be taken seriously. If we allow ourselves to become immune to the suffering of animals simply because we view them as lesser beings than ourselves we are treading a dangerous path.

Samantha Chandler, Hartley Wintnev, Hambshire

Sir, I am a country person born and bred, who qualified in agriculture 50 years ago and has spent a lifetime working in agriculture in the Caribbean, the UK, and Africa. I also founded a charity that funds food aid projects mostly in Africa. HIPPO (Registered Charity No. 1075420) does not promote the breeding, rearing, or eating of animals. There are millions of people in Africa who eat very little or no meat. Some do so from choice, for reasons of health, religion, or compassion to animals, though for many admittedly it is involuntary simply because they cannot afford it. Most of the meat in the world is eaten by relatively wealthy people —

even in African countries. The poor often subsist on high carbohydrate, low protein foods like maize, millet or sorghum and little else. Through Pax Africa, a Kenyan-based organisation, HIPPO helps many poor people to have an improved diet by ensuring that they get beans, peas, lentils, vegetables and fruit, with their maize. Soya is 40 per cent protein and contains all the essential amino acids, as do other vegetable proteins when eaten in variety. Raising livestock is utterly wasteful of land and precious water. Meat eaters on average require at least 2 hectares of land to support them whereas the world has only a fifth of a hectare of agricultural land each for the six and a half billion people in it.

When the Rev Ulric Gerry comments (Sep 21) on what he sees as disproportionate concern for animal welfare, has he stopped to realize that his extravagant meat eating habit deprives others of even basic food commodities or the land to grow them on?

When Pax Africa helps orphanages, for example, it pays for water boreholes and irrigation so that good nutritious vegetable and fruit crops can be grown and trees planted. It certainly does not pay for cows and goats. A study in 1995 estimated that the annual loss of land productivity caused by goats and other grazing animals in Africa was about £4 billion. It has been said that goats created the Sahara desert. Now it is extending southwards at the rate of 600 metres per year. The Daily Trust newspaper of the Reverend's own city of Abuja reported on September 20 "At least 50 million Nigerians in 11 states have their livelihoods threatened by desertification ... Lake Chad has shrunk in volume and spatial coverage." This is partly due to land degradation by grazing and partly by climate change. Climate change itself is due in large part to the world's huge and growing appetite for meat. Livestock cause more global warming than all the transport in the world added together because they emit methane which is 23 times more powerful as a greenhouse gas than Carbon Dioxide. This is the assessment of the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organisation. Thankfully the Nigerian Government is battling the problem there. Halima Tayo Alao, the Environment Minister, says that all Nigerians need to "return to understanding that planting a tree anywhere in the frontline states is a service to humanity." Unfortunately it is a waste of time planting trees if cattle and goats are then allowed to destroy them.

Finally your correspondent says rather dogmatically, "Human beings were not created to be vegans." I wonder what authority he bases that on? Certainly not the Bible for the first chapter of Genesis says precisely that we were!

Neville Fowler, Director, Help International Plant Protein Organisation, Llangynog, Carmarthen

Sir, The Rev Ulric Gerry (letter last week) has many facts wrong. Genesis 1:29 makes it clear that humans were intended to be vegans. It was human sin which led to killing entering the world. God's non-violent ideal will be restored (Isaiah 11, 6-9) when Jesus returns. The vast majority of us don't have to kill to survive, so praying "thy Kingdom come" needs a lifestyle to match.

Mr Gerry's comparison of the Donkey Sanctuary to children's charities is odd. According to Charities Direct data the Donkey Sanctuary is the 287th charity in income, with 12 specifically children's charities above it. Barnardo's income is nine times that of the Donkey Sanctuary, and Save the Children's eight times. Animal charities make up only three per cent of the top 300.

As for mink, many escaped from fur farms or were released by farmers whose businesses collapsed long before any were released by activists.

In Britain alone 300 animals a second die in slaughterhouses and three million a year have suffering imposed on them in scientific experiments: the vast majority of these animals are treated in ways which Proverbs 12:10 calls wicked. So come on, Mr Gerry, give the poor creatures a break. Bring on God's Kingdom for all — don't resist it.

Barry Miles, Uxbridge

28th September 2007 *Why is it that evangelicals lack compassion for animals?*

By Rachel Hovenden

THE ANGLICAN Society for the Welfare of Animals (ASWA) held a special service in April at St John's Church, Waterloo, hoping to attract many evangelicals. Their speaker was the well-known evangelical Dr Tony Campolo and they had advertised in numerous Church newspapers. Yet, in ASWA's autumn bulletin, Samantha Chandler, Secretary to ASWA, bemoaned the fact that few evangelical Christians had attended the service. She commented: "Sadly, however, it seems that animal welfare is still viewed as a subject not worthy of much consideration by our fellow Christians."

So why is it that many evangelicals are apparently ambivalent about animal welfare? Sometimes the excuse is given that there is so much human suffering in the world that we shouldn't divert our attention to that of animal suffering.

Yet, some may be surprised to discover that the great evangelical and social reformer, William Wilberforce, while most famous for his campaign for the abolition of the slave trade was also one of the co-founders of the RSPCA. Wilberforce was a pioneer for animal welfare, and helped to set up the Society for the

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) on June 16, 1824 seeking to enforce a new law to prevent cruelty to horses, sheep and cattle. It later became the RSPCA under Queen Victoria.

Jackie Ballard, the RSPCA's current director general, said: "As a great humanitarian, Wilberforce knew that the capacity to care for animals is wholly compatible with caring for human beings. "We need each other." When the Society began, many people mocked Wilberforce's views. But he did not give up. He was determined when fighting the slave trade, and he was similarly focused when campaigning for animal welfare. He helped push through a ban on cruelty to cattle in 1822 and spoke passionately in favour of a bill to ban bull baiting, a cruel spectator sport where dogs were set upon a bull which was tied to a post or tree.

Tony Cairipolo suggested, when speaking at the ASWA service, that lack of interest in animal welfare issues among evangelicals today was partly due to the view that people were far more important than the rest of God's creation. He commented: "That's the ethnocentric mind set of the human race, we think that everything exists for us." Yet creation was not created purely for our benefit, but rather to give God glory, reflecting his character. God created each aspect of his creation out of his goodness and love.

In Genesis 1 man is commanded to 'rule' over "the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." Yet the following verse says: "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Reading these verses together, it sounds as if we should rule over - animals as people made in the image of God. Our place in creation means that the fate and survival of animals depend on our behaviour. But our rule is to be one of care, compassion and justice, not one of domination or exploitation.

Many of the Psalms speak of animals giving praise to God, as in Psalm 148: "Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths... wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds". The question that must be asked is, if animals, creatures, birds and cattle are meant to give God glory and praise, is it possible for them to do so when they are mistreated, and caused to suffer unnecessary pain and torment by human beings? As Christians we need to give God glory in our lives, but also, it is important that we allow people, animals, creatures and the whole of creation to give God glory as he intended. We are called throughout the Bible to show compassion to the weak and oppressed, and in doing so God is glorified. So it seems that Animals in need deserve our attention and compassion alongside human people.

This year's animal welfare service, organized by the ASWA is taking place at St Michael and All Angels' Church, Watford on Saturday October 13, at 2.30pm. The speaker will be Brother Samuel from the Society of St Francis, whose founder, of course, was St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals, birds, and the environment. The theme for this year's service is fur. Fur farming was outlawed in England and Wales in 2003 and similar legislation has now been passed in Scotland. An increasing number of European countries have introduced, or are in the process of introducing legislation of this kind, but fur farming still continues in many countries around the world, with most animals being kept in horrific conditions.

Recent figures suggest around 180 million rabbits are bred and killed each year for their fur; Europe and China being the biggest producers. The conditions under which animals are kept are similar throughout the world. Barren wire cages line open-sided sheds, which house the animals that are fed with dollops of paste placed on the cage tops. As an example, two Arctic foxes would be kept in a cage about the size of an average coffee table. There cannot be any justification for this kind of treatment of animals, for what are essentially luxury items, such as fur coats, wraps, shawls and trimmings. The suffering of animals through fur farming cannot be reconciled with a Christian understanding of God's loving creation.

But what can we do as Christians? Firstly we need to consider and meditate on what the bible says about God's loving care for animals. Secondly we need to pray for the whole of God's creation, "the earth and all that is in it." But we also need to take action. We can do this by supporting organisations like the ASWA and the RSPCA, which seek to inform, prevent and protect animals from cruelty. It is possible to care for humans, for animals, and the whole earth. We can do all these things together knowing that in each of these we are bringing God glory, and caring for the world he created.

Dr Campolo's address can be down-loaded from the ASWA website, www.aswa.org.uk

19th October 2007

Animal concern delight

Sir, What a delight it was to read your article by Rachel Hovenden (CEN Sept 28). I'd long held the belief that the Church was ambivalent about animal welfare but thank-' fully read a short article about the Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals some -five years ago and since then I have become a Christian.

I hope you are able to reach many more young people who are passionate about these issues.

Keith Plumridge, UpperPendock, Worcs

16th November 2007***Prevention is better than cure*** by Alan Storkey

The business of going before, of preventing something which might happen from happening, is an important part of Me. We try to prevent floods, fires, accidents, failures of machinery and unemployment. Such activity involves thinking ahead, seeing what might go wrong and developing wisdom to avoid the disaster or the personal tragedy. It is not difficult to look around and see this issue opening up everywhere. Suddenly, we seem to have woken up to the fact that preventative medicine is better than open heart surgery or debilitating diseases, but, of course, the evidence has been around for centuries.

Biblical understanding has gone before this development in modern life. Much of the Scriptures have the form of warning and pointing out consequences, not only in details, but also in the central direction of life. It is as if God is trying to give humankind a grasp of the future, so that paths can be mapped out for blessing. There was the first warning: "If you sin you will surely die." Later warnings were often repeated to people who seem unable to hear and grasp what the consequences of their actions will be. Cain cannot grasp what the outworking of his anger will be, nor can Saul or the later kings identify where they are going wrong. The prophets warn about disobedience and idolatry, holding people to the goodness of God's law as the way to walk.

That law is also full of prevention, not just safety precautions on flat roofs, but also the significance of honouring your parents, of leaving land fallow and of having years of Jubilee and forgiveness of debt. There is also a prophetic dimension to prevention. Joseph, the first prophet, in Egypt is given an understanding by God of forthcoming famine, and he counsels a seven year stockpiling of resources against that famine and is thus able to prevent the starvation and death of many. This account of a substantial crisis in Egyptian civilisation occurring so early in human history should make us pause and value this orientation to life.

If God's purposes for understanding what might happen and what can be prevented are so clearly mapped in Genesis, then how much more fully should it apply in our own lives? Today, we have the technical means of mapping the future in all kinds of areas. But still we seem to fail in most of them, whether in terms of bringing up children, health, traffic accidents, wars or chemical addictions.

For the culture seems to be working against this kind of awareness. We are accident-prone. It is not just that United States' aircraft finish up carrying nuclear weapons about unknown and by mistake — oops, but that China, a billion people nation, can decide to desert the bike and take up the car when it is obvious that in 10 years all their cities will be in automobile deadlock. Why can we not see these things?

Possibly, the answer lies in the commitment in a consumer culture of living 'for the present'. It is a small phrase, but a pregnant one. We can live fully in the present, but 'for' the present, without the prescience of looking ahead and thinking about the future? That is surely folly, and so it often turns out. Binge drinking, fast cars, luxury holidays, living on credit, things that bring the horizon of time down to the present, negate wisdom and long-termism. Protestantism in the past, probably because of its biblical roots, has been good on living with this long-term wisdom. Biblical precepts, even if we do not understand why, guard us against problems that might otherwise occur. They prevent us, they go before in our lives.

We are now facing one of the greatest preventions in human history, that of global warming. The technical business is addressed in thousands of scientific studies. Yet, the reason why these are questioned, rather than being subject to normal academic peer assessment, is that millions of people want to live for the present, for their present. At present we are fiddling while the planet burns. This is a lifestyle issue, but deeper than that, it is caused from moving out of a biblical understanding of past, present and future being contained within God's purposes for us.

Fighting this idolatry of the self and the present is a task for Christians, first of all in our own lives, and millions of us in the west have scarcely begun to grasp the levels of indulgence that we are being asked to call into question. But, more than this, it is a task of Christianity, for unless God, the owner of time, is allowed again to prevent us, we are on the broad road, the motorway, that leads to destruction. And this time there is no cure.

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21st December 2007**Vegetarian Christmas**

Sir, May I express my thanks to Harriet Wynne-Jones for her timely pre-Christmas (almost) vegetarian recipe for artichoke and mushroom ciabatta dressing (Dec 14).

This sounds good enough to be eaten without the traditional turkey, which is subjected to much suffering in an intensive rearing and slaughter process. Surely we should celebrate the feast for the commemoration of the nativity of the one we call 'Prince of Peace' in a compassionate, non-violent way?

Vegetarian alternatives, such as non-meat 'roasts' and pies are quick and easy to prepare, and would be delicious and nutritious along with Ms Wynne-Jones' recipe, mean less time in the kitchen for the cook!

If you must be a carnivore, choose organic free-range poultry. If you require more information please contact the Christian Vegetarian Association UK at www.christianvegetarian.co.uk.

Margaret A Turner, Chesham, Bucks

28th December 2007

Your Church - Lincoln

A cleric's dog is taking a paws for thought in pews around the diocese. Jack, an 11-year-old beagle who belongs to the Rev Canon Terry Steele, Rector of the Burgh group of parishes near Skegness, is regularly seen at the services of the recently consecrated canon, and even attended his master's installation as a canon at Lincoln Cathedral. "He goes everywhere with me," said Canon Steele. "I do four or five services every Sunday and he comes to them all." The pair appear on the front cover of a book about clergy and their dogs entitled 'Dog Collar' by Richard Surman. However, Jack is said to be reluctant to join in services and is not a fan of incense, which makes him sneeze. #

25th January 2008

Poultry concern

Sir, As Secretary of the Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals, I was not surprised by the shocking revelations about the poultry industry revealed in Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's recent, excellent Channel 4 programme. Organisations such as Compassion in World Farming have been campaigning about this issue for many years and we are pleased that at last it has gained media interest.

Church of England Newspaper readers might be interested to know that this year, Animal Welfare Sunday (Sunday October 5) will be focused on this shameful industry and free information packs will be available by the end of August to assist those churches who are planning special services.

We will be hoping that clergy will be urging Christians to take a stand and choose the Free Range or Organic option when buying chickens for their Sunday lunch. Whilst we have every sympathy for those families on a tight budget, it is only by demand from the public that free range prices will become more affordable. As Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall ably demonstrated in his programme, a good quality chicken can be stretched for several meals, making it more economical.

There was a time when chicken was regarded as a luxury item, eaten maybe once a week. Nowadays, we seem to regard it as our right to eat it several times a week and the huge pressure to produce an ever cheaper product has compromised animal welfare hugely. Can it possibly be right that the life of a sentient creature is only worth £2.50?

Samantha Chandler, Secretary, Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals www.aswa.org.uk

22nd February 2008

Poultry

Sir, I agree with Samantha Chandler's letter "Poultry concern" on January 25. She runs the group Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals who are very con-

-cerned about poor welfare standards in factory farming. Some battery hens kept in cages so small that they have no room to even open their wings. God created hens to

- walk outside in the sun and dust bathe, but

' this natural behaviour is denied them.

This rebounds on human health, because to keep animals healthy in the cramped, unhealthy conditions many are routinely fed antibiotics. The people who eat this meat then take in residues of the antibiotics.

This is one reason why antibiotics are increasingly failing to work in hospitals. Intensive farmers say their methods give us cheap food — but when the human and financial cost of antibiotic-resistant super-bugs, e-coli and salmonella are taken into account, this so called "cheap food" works out very expensive indeed.

Increasingly, tests show that animals are much more intelligent than scientists had believed them to be. This means that animals may be well aware of their cruel treatment. But in any case, any creature with a sensitive nervous system feels pain and discomfort. I think that Christians who can afford it should try and buy some free-range organic produce to minimise the suffering of God's creatures and to encourage ethical farming.

Ann Wills Ruislip, Middx

Church Times

23rd November 2007

People are not convinced on climate

The PM has a problem in getting action on green issues, says Paul Vallely

MOST OF US, unless we are ideologues or inordinate idealists, live with contradiction. One day this week, I had to write a leader article about the Prime Minister's first significant speech on the environment. Afterwards, I went to the gym, and fell into conversation about global warming with one of the other regulars, Douglas, a Scot.

The Independent's somewhat astringent editorial line was that, on green issues, Gordon Brown is all mouth and no trousers. My gym-friend Douglas's line, by contrast, was that global warming is all a con, and was first dreamt up by Margaret Thatcher to justify closing down the coal industry. This demonstrates a somewhat shaky grasp of the history of British politics, but it shows that dodgy facts are no bar to having an opinion when it comes to global warming.

The world is full of Douglases. I looked at the website of the Edinburgh Evening News that night. Without exception, all the readers comments on Mr Brown's speech were sceptical or dismissive. It was all just another excuse to put up taxes, they moaned.

This is a pretty rum business. Last weekend, we had the most authoritative statement to date from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Its synthesis report, distilled from more than 3000 pages of research, warned that global warming is an unequivocal fact. If we carry on as we are, there will be human catastrophe on a worldwide scale by the end of this century — the poor in developing countries being the hardest hit.

Being caught between a Northern Rock and a hard place looks small beer for Gordon Brown, compared with being caught between such science and the Douglases of this world. Perhaps that is why the Prime Minister's response was so measured. Promises such as insulating five million more homes, handing out millions of cheap, low-energy light bulbs, installing smart electricity meters, and setting up a green homes service to cut carbon emissions from private houses (which create nearly 30 per cent of Britain's total) seem like safe options — as does asking supermarkets to do away with throwaway plastic bags.

He pleased the Greens with plans for a competition to build the world's first commercial carbon-capture-and-storage plant in Britain, and his intention to generate 20 per cent of energy from renewables (instead of a measly two per cent at present). But his plans for the really big stuff were a good deal vaguer.

There are probably two reasons for this. The scale of the problem means that it will be properly tackled only by a global agreement. Mr Brown's tactics seem to be to keep his big concessions up his sleeve for international negotiations, though he has raised the bar before next month's climate-change conference in Bali by hinting that the UK will cut emissions by 80 per cent rather than the 60 per cent already announced. But he clearly does not want to disadvantage Britain by taking steps to slap tax on aviation fuel or impose higher emission standards in cars, unless the rest of Europe does.

Given the attitude of the Douglases of this world, this is understandable, if regrettable. The hard political fact is that the public is not yet convinced by the overwhelming consensus of the scientific community. Or, if they accept it intellectually, there is nothing visceral to back the idea of urgent action or to defer the gratification of today for a better tomorrow.

What is odd in Douglas's case is that he has bought the argument to curtail his personal consumption, which is why he is on a constant diet and is a regular at the gym. But that is because a few years ago he had a heart attack. It is to be hoped that the world does not have to wait for a crisis of those proportions before it acts.

Paul Vallely is associate editor of The Independent

23rd November 2007 **Christian Aid reports on human cost of climate** by Bill Bowder

POOR PEOPLE across the work need the billions of pounds of extra help raised by new carbon taxes or industrial nations in order to adapt to global warming. The extra money — up to \$100 billion a year — will be required, even if the UN climate change summit in Bali next month agrees to keep global temperature increases to 2°C, Christian Aid said in a report, *The Human Face of Climate Change*, which it issued this week.

"As ministers prepare for the Bali summit, the stakes could not be higher," the agency says. To talk about climate change without linking it to the fight against poverty would condemn millions of people to further upheaval, unrest, disease, and life-threatening disaster". "Climate change and poverty are mixing in the lives of the world's poorest people to deadly effect. More frequent drought and more severe seasonal flooding are testing the limits of community resilience, pushing precarious lives closer to the edge."

Delegates to the Bali summit need to consider three responses, which should be made simultaneously, the report recommends first, rich countries must respond to the crisis by keeping their promises to increase

overseas aid to improve poor people's chance of survival. They should ensure that any economic growth is of sustainable benefit to poor people. Second, "strong plans" to cope with climate change must be inter-woven with poverty-reduction strategies and backed by additional funding. Third, "climate change must be tackled at source, through mass and rapid cuts in greenhouse gas emissions; the polluter must stop polluting."

In a series of case studies, Christian Aid considers the impact that climate change is already having on some of the world's poorest communities. It also suggests how they can adapt, given the necessary funds and advice. In Bolivia, at Norte Potosi and at Ancoraimes, near the border with Peru, Christian Aid's partners report that communities have noted "detailed and profound changes in the local weather and plants and animal life", which have affected their food supply, the clothes they wear, their income, and where they live. They speak of the world "upside down and trembling . . . the earth is drying as if hanged up to dry in the sun." Their potato crops have been ruined by unexpected frosts a hailstones big enough to kill birds; snow has fallen in the summer, and the rainy season has been halved. Pasture for the sheep has been damaged, and they are infested with fleas and ticks. As their flocks reduced, they had less meat, less cheese, and less wool for food, clothing, and barter. Young people from the village were leaving for the cities.

On the Dogon Plateau in eastern Mali, the young are also leaving for the cities, as farming grows more difficult. The village chief of Tounoulna, N'Dogo Karambe, who is in his 80s, said there had been plenty of rain and food when he was a child. "But as it no longer rains as it used to, we are all now experiencing a severe lack of food." Hawa Tebsougue, the vice-president of the village's women's association, said the amount of cereals they produced diminished each year. "We cannot even celebrate marriages because there's no money to buy food for the celebration," she said.

Yet there is also evidence of people's ability to adapt. In Jamaica, a hurricane-resistant chicken coop has protected Esilia Lang's 75 chickens from a category-four hurricane. Nearby, a Mrs Harvey, without a coop, lost 50 birds and her income for two months. On the Dogon Plateau, villagers have learnt to build stone walls along contours to stop soil erosion. They have stopped cutting down trees, which are essential to retain the soil, and have formed a tree watch to make sure no one else cuts them down.

In Bangladesh, communities are using clean clay water-jars to harvest rain. The improvement in their health has led them to tackle other problems, such as erosion caused by the river. Christian Aid says, however, that international finance for adaptation to climate change is too restricted. The report recommends that further information be shared about good adaptations and how they work.

The Human Face of Climate Change will be downloadable from www.christianaid.org.uk.

30th November 2007 *The earth is doomed by bad theology*

Alan Billings exposes what he says are the theological roots beneath humanity's abuse of the planet

FORTY YEARS AGO, an article appeared in the journal *Science* that caused a stir in both scientific and religious circles. It was entitled: "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis": The author, Professor Lynn White, suggested that, while all forms of life make their mark on the environment, the human race was now inflicting ecological disaster on planet Earth. This was due, in part, to modern technology, but also to Christian faith. Christianity was a carrier of arrogant and exploitative attitudes towards the natural world which had decisively shaped the thinking and practice of people in the West. The root of these offending attitudes lay in the Bible, specifically Genesis and the first creation story: "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion . . . over all the earth'" (Genesis 1.26).

THE ARTICLE sent biblical scholars scurrying back to the texts. They emerged to say that "having dominion over" did not mean "exploiting" but "taking care of": It was about being good stewards of the natural world. But 2000 years of history are not so easily undone. Wherever you look in the Christian past, you find attitudes towards the creation which distress modern sensibilities. This is not to say that there were not exceptions. In the Middle Ages, there was St Francis with his wonderful *Canticle to the Sun* (1224). In the 18th century, there was Humphry Primatt. If the name is unfamiliar, that is because his cause — treating animals humanely — was rejected by most people in his day. More recently there has been Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) and his ethic of "reverence for life": "The ethical (person) tears no leaf from a tree, plucks no flower, and takes care to crush no insect. . . If he comes across an insect which has fallen in a puddle, he stops a moment in order to hold out a leaf or a stalk on which it can save itself."

But these are untypical. Most Christians have taken their cue from St Thomas Aquinas. He was very clear what the biblical texts meant: the natural creation was there to serve human beings. As he said of animals: "For by divine providence they are intended for man's use in the natural order. Hence it is not wrong for man to make use of them, either by killing or in any way whatever." And if anyone worried about animal suffering, they could always take comfort from an observation of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) that animals were not sentient creatures, but more like machines. Their apparent cries of pain were but the creaking of machinery. As Lynn White wrote: "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt."

BUT a problem remains as long as the Genesis story is allowed the central place in Christian thinking about the natural world. This is because, in Genesis, humanity is the reason for creation: it assumes that the natural world was brought into being for us and to serve us. Modern science has revealed the insignificance of Earth in the vastness of the universe, and the fact that human beings have evolved by natural selection over a long period of time. In the light of that, this aspect of the biblical legacy ought to have been seen off.

Yet it lingers on in the way that both religious and secular people continue to talk about humanity as if we were the point of everything. Mark Twain said this was like saying that if the Eiffel Tower represents the world's age, the skin of paint on the pinnacle-knob represents man's share of that age, and anyone could see that the skin was what the tower was built-for. I recently heard a presentation on global warming inspired by Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*. The speaker said we had 20 years to save the planet. He meant, we had 20 years to save the human race, which is not the same. The planet goes on even if we make it uncongenial for human life.

ALL MIGHT yet change. According to a more recent article in *Science*, astronomers may be on the brink of discovering, beyond our solar system, planets that resemble Earth. If they do, this would raise the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the universe, — perhaps intelligent life. If this were to happen, the theology derived from the Genesis creation stories would need a rapid overhaul. We would have to revise fundamentally our understanding of the relationship of God to the world and humanity.

We ought to have done that long ago, because Genesis is not the only place where the scriptures speak about the universe and our place in it. In at least one other book — Job — there is a strikingly different perspective. After Job has finished complaining about the unfairness of the world, God decides to put him in his place (for Job, read: all human beings). "Where were you", God says, "when I laid the foundations of the earth?" He then gives Job a David Attenborough tour of the creation in all its variety and vastness. Job knows nothing of these things; but God knows everything intimately and, moreover, delights in it. In other words, God brought all of this into being and took pleasure from it long before human life made its appearance.

We are not at the centre of the world, and it has not evolved for our exclusive benefit. Human beings are not the only reason for the creation. This is sobering stuff. Too much contemporary talk about the environment is actually the same old talk that has humanity at the centre. We need to think differently about our place in the scheme of things. Otherwise, one distant day, we may take these same exploitative attitudes to some other wayside planet.

Canon Dr Alan Billings is Director of the Centre for Ethics and Religion at Lancaster University.

Genesis 1.26 From the Revd Dr Mark Hart

Sir, — Canon Dr Alan Billings (Comment, 30 November) judges the status of humanity in the universe by the smallness of our planet and the youth of our species. Since when did size or age determine significance? God forbid that our church in Guilden Sutton should catch fire, but, if it did, which would be the priority for protection: the large, ancient, overhanging yew trees or the children trapped inside?

Genesis is not an unfortunate legacy to be "seen off"; for, without it, we give free rein to the growing misanthropy in today's environmentalism. We are indeed uniquely guilty, but paradoxically it is our dignity that made this possible. I am both higher and lower than my dog. The Genesis story is not the cause of our abuse, but the witness to its origins.

MARK HART The Vicarage, Wicker Lane Guilden Sutton Chester CH3 7EL

7th December 2007

Pining for the Kingdom by John Pridmore

IN THE HEBREW BIBLE, our "Old Testament"; there are three great images of "the best yet to be". These images have enabled the Christian Church to speak, at least a little less incoherently, about the Advent hope. The prophets looked forward to "the once and future king", to the garden, and to the city. So do we. With Isaiah, we watch and pray for the coming of "great David's greater Son": With him, we pine for paradise. With him, we long for the New Jerusalem.

The coming king — here is the first startling picture — will be "a shoot from a stump". Matthew Henry comments: "Both the words here used signify a weak, small, tender product, a twig and a sprig (so some render them), such as is easily broken off." (Matthew Henry published his mighty six-volume commentary on the Bible in 1706. Evangelical students were once urged to sell their shirts to get hold of it) A later poem, also attributed to Isaiah, will speak of one who "grew up like a root out of dry ground" (Isaiah 53.2). "The Messiah was thus to begin his estate of humiliation," says Matthew Henry. "The spirit of the Lord will rest upon him." Again, Matthew Henry: "The Holy Spirit, in all his gifts and graces, shall not only come, but rest and abide upon him; he shall have the Spirit not by measure, but without measure, the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in him."

We duly say Amen to that, but not without first noting that, in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is invariably given for a specific task. So here the promised king will come with a particular mission. His royal

role will be to "judge the poor" Judgement in the Old Testament is not the deliverance of a verdict. It is the deliverance of people. It is setting wrongs right. Christian readers of Isaiah's prophecy will hear words that startled the back row of the synagogue in Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to reach good news to the poor" (Luke 4.18).

Once the king comes, the conditions of paradise will be restored. On that day "the wolf shall live with the lamb." This will come as good news for the lambs around at the time, but, unless we believe in the resurrection of mutton, it will be little comfort for all those previously savaged by wolves and butchered by us. This is not a facetious point. Few issues are more troubling to the Christian conscience and to Christian faith than the pain of animals. In Helen Waddell's novel, *Peter Abelard*, Abelard's heart is broken by the screams of a rabbit tortured in a trap. He releases the rabbit, but it dies in his hands. "Do you think there is a God at all?" he asks his companion, Thibault. "Whatever has come to me, I earned it. But what did this one do?": For Tennyson, too, it was all too much. Nature "shrieked against his creed": Even before Darwin, nature's message from the fossils was clear. "I care for nothing" (*In Memoriam A. H.H.*).

Now that we know something of the waste and pain that has brought us to our stage of evolution, we can perhaps begin to sense the magnitude of Isaiah's vision. Paul shared this vision. He spoke of the whole creation obtaining "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8.18-25). Where do we stand? Are we as convinced as Paul was that "the sufferings of this present time" — the lamb's, the kid's, the calf's, the sufferings of Abelard's rabbit, and of all those preyed upon by wild animals such as ourselves — are "not worth comparing" with the glory to be revealed?

What kind of a coming Kingdom, we wonder, could possibly compensate for aeons of animal anguish? We cannot begin to contemplate what such an order of existence would be like. But we must not walk away from the prophetic and Pauline picture of a paradise large enough to embrace all God's creatures. We may be brighter than the beasts, but we are no better than they are. The hope of glory embraces them. If that is too much for us to take in, all we can do is — yet again — to pray: "Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief?"

"A little child shall lead them." The text means more than Isaiah meant, though surely he, too, rejoiced when the servant king he had seen from afar gave to a child the highest standing in his Kingdom (Mark 10.14). Isaiah pictures little children playing safely and with great delight (that is what the Hebrew means) in the garden of God, just as Zechariah saw them playing on the streets of the city of God (Zechariah 8.5). The boundaries of that city ("my holy mountain") in the prophet's - inclusive vision are the ends of the earth, for, at the last, all shall know as they always have been known. This — although we have yet to turn to our reading from Matthew — is the Gospel of the Lord. #

14th December 2007 *Time is short for the planet, warn Pope and UN head*
by Bill Bowder

THE POPE and the UN Secretary General both said this week that the world had only a short time to sort out climate change.

Benedict XVI said in a message, which was timed to coincide with the UN conference in Bali on climate change (Comment, 30 November), and issued in advance for the World Day of Peace on 1 January, that the time to save the planet as the common home of humanity was short. He called on the world to be ready to create a new international agency to guide the response to climate change.

The Pope rejected the idea that animals or "material" was more important than humans, who were "of supreme worth vis-is-vis creation as a whole". But humans had to make sure that the world was protected and cultivated responsibly. Nature, in all its richness, should be cared for.

What was essential, he said, was "to 'sense' that the earth is 'our common home, and, in our stewardship and service to all, to choose the path of dialogue rather than the path of unilateral decisions". Dialogue needed to intensify between the technologically advanced nations, with their high energy consumption, and the emerging nations, who were "hungry for energy". Developed countries should reassess their developments so that they used less material. Poorer countries should not be forced to undersell their energy resources, he said.

At the meeting in Bali on Wednesday, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, said that the "time to act is now". An agenda must be set that would lead to a climate treaty by 2009. "We gather because the time for equivocation is over," he said. "The science is clear. Climate change is happening. The impact is real."

The Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, who has brought his country into the Kyoto Protocol, told the conference that Australia would commit itself to "real" and "robust" targets to slash greenhouse-gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 from 2000 levels. Countries that had not signed up to Kyoto — the US is the only large developed one — should "embrace comparable efforts in order to bring about the global outcomes the world now expects".

The US said it wanted a treaty, but with no greenhouse-gas targets. #

7th December 2007

back page interview (Extract)

John Houghton scientist and former co-chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

This Christmas, I would challenge everyone to send a cow, or buy another ethical gift, rather than buying presents that no one really needs. I have become patron of the Send a Cow charity. There is so much we can do in the rich part of the world to help the poor; yet at the moment the net flow of money is from the poor to the rich. I think our Old Testament prophets, as well Jesus, would have a lot to say about this. #

21st December 2007

Don't send a cow From Mr Don Gwillim

Sir, — As an admirer of Sir John Houghton and his efforts to raise our awareness of the consequences of climate change, I was shocked to discover that he was also a supporter and patron of Send a Cow (Back Page Interview, 7 December).

According to the United Nations' report Livestock's Long Shadow, "The livestock sector emerges as one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global. The findings of this report suggest that it should be a major policy focus when dealing with problems of land degradation, climate change and air pollution, water shortage and water pollution, and loss of biodiversity."

Encouraging poor countries to embrace animal agriculture is neither ethical nor right, and is inconsistent with Sir John's excellent efforts to reduce humankind's contribution to global warming.

Don Gwillim, Foresta, Pines Road, Liphook, GU30 7PL

4th January 2007 Send a Cow and the environmental impact of livestock farming

From Mr Anthony Bush

Sir, — Don Gwillim (Letters, 21/28 December), with breath-taking hypocrisy, would want the UN's Livestock's Long Shadow to fall more heavily across Africa than across us. The reverse is the truth. If he has read the UN report, he will know that it states that animal products are both a cause of obesity and a remedy for malnourishment. It suggests that it is the West's fertiliser nitrogen, put into cattle crops, which causes much of the shadow.

By contrast, Send a Cow has pioneered organic farming in every country in which it uses farm animals. A preliminary Send a Cow survey shows that organic farming that uses composted kitchen and garden waste with animal manure actually produces a negative carbon footprint (less emitted than absorbed), as well as multiplying the productivity of the land by four times. Further carbon blame is laid by the UN report at the door of those who destroy the rain forest for livestock production; whereas Send a Cow from its inception has encouraged layered canopy growth to keep farming within the rain forest. This small-scale farming encourages Africans to remain in rural areas rather than gravitate, as people in the West have, to cities.

Twenty years ago, at Send a Cow's inception, we were criticised for helping Africa at all (waste of time and money); for using indigenous support workers (incompetent and easily corrupted); for using women as our major donor recipients (what can women do?); and relying on organic farming methods (all muck and magic). Today, we are relieved to see these policy decisions vindicated. The bigger question is: "Why is this model not being rolled out across much of the Third World?" With enough funding, it could be.

Anthony Bush, Founder Chairman and President Send a Cow, The Old Estate Yard, Newton St Loe, Bath, BA2 9BR

From the Revd John Chesworth

Sir,- Don Gwillim suggests that people should refrain from giving to charities that support livestock production in developing countries. His ideas imperil the well-being, or even survival, of some of the most vulnerable people in the world; and he is not in possession of the facts.

In general, such initiatives do not encourage people to take up livestock farming: they help existing farmers to adapt to new situations. Throughout the developing world, traditional farmers are having to change their ways in the face of enormous challenges from increasing population density and from ecological degradation. Traditional pastoral systems with ruminant livestock are the way of transforming vegetation indigestible by humans into high-quality food for people, and as the motive power for cultivating the fields.

The manure is valuable either as a source of fuel or as fertiliser. Productivity in terms of kilogramme: of food per animal per year is extremely low in comparison with Western expectations. Many animals are kept solely as an alternative to a bank account and as a visible expression of wealth and social status. Even animals that are merely being maintained release about eight per cent of their dietary energy intake in the form of methane without producing anything useful. This applies equally to the wild ruminant herbivores who would live in many of those environments if domestic livestock were removed.

Thus, changes that improve the productivity of livestock through appropriate genetic improvements of the animals and better use of low quality feeds reduce the amount of methane produced per kilogramme of food

produced or per metre ploughed. These are the changes that enlightened assistance seeks to bring to the poorest of the poor as they struggle to survive in a changing world.

The report to which Mr Gwillim refers, *Livestock's Long Shadow*, is not a simple affair of doom and gloom, since its main conclusion is that "Major reductions in impact could be achieved at reasonable cost." The report acknowledges specifically the part that animal agriculture plays in the survival of poor people in developing countries: "The livestock sector . . . creates livelihoods for one billion of the world's poor."

In its thrust, the report shows quite clearly that it is industrialised commercial production, particularly that which is located close to urban centres of population, which is mainly responsible for undesirable effects on the environment. These enterprises are, however, far removed from the smallholder farming systems that are served by charities that seek to "send a cow".

It would ill behove the Church to try to force the ethical values of Mr Gwillim's vegetarian pressure group on to people living at the margins of survival and whose traditional way of life depends wholly or in part on livestock production.

John M. Chesworth, Tranmere Parish Office, 306 Old Chester Road, Rock Ferry, CH42 3XD

Not Published

From Neville Fowler

Sir, -- THE IMPACT OF LIVESTOCK FARMING

Anthony Bush (Letters 4th January) justifies Send a Cow's provision of more farm animals for Africa by linking them with 'organic farming'. This is disingenuous, for organic crop production by using compost was traditional in Africa before westerners ever came on the scene promoting more and 'improved' livestock and chemical fertilizers. Indeed, there is an impetus to return to this system in the areas I know in Ethiopia (witness the excellent work done by the Ethiopian Institute for Sustainable Development with the support of HIPPO), in Malawi, Tanzania, and Kenya. If animal manures are available then of course they will be added to the compost pit but they are by no means essential. Nothing comes out of the back end of an animal that hasn't gone in through the front! Vegetation can be composted directly without passing through an animal's digestive system.

John Chesworthy (ibid) states that the way to make livestock less damaging to the environment is through "genetic improvement" to increase their productivity. That has had the reverse effect in the west where the process is most advanced. Why should it work in Africa? Besides, the evidence is that animals descended from imported stock are less suitable and more prone to disease than native breeds.

John Chesworthy also expresses concern for the survival of the traditional way of life of the pastoralists. Is that more important than the survival of the people themselves? What they actually want is a reliable supply of food, education for their children, clean water supplies, hygienic sanitation, better housing, hospitals and primary health care. Every society that aspires to these things has to undergo change. Our own forebears had to accept great agricultural, industrial, and social changes over the centuries to enable us to have the benefits we enjoy today. What right do we have to put certain tribes of the human race into museum like reservations, in the same way that we put wild animals into safari parks? For whose benefit is this intended? The suggestion that the way to help traditional livestock farmers "to change their ways in the face of enormous challenges from increasing population density and from ecological degradation" is to give them more livestock, doesn't look like change to me; it looks like more of the same medicine that has failed.

What both of these gentlemen favour is an increase in the production and consumption of meat and milk in the developing world. Their mistaken belief is that this is the way for the poor to become more prosperous and healthier. Such views merely reflect their own dietary and agricultural predilections. They are not supported by the facts.

In 2005 I had the misfortune to witness livestock dying like flies in the great drought that beset Kenya at that time. I am heartened that some of the pastoralists in those areas have themselves recognised that their old way of life can no longer provide them and their families with food security, and even without outside help they have begun to turn to the production of vegetable food crops in a way that is entirely novel for them. It is these initiatives that HIPPO seeks to support by funding wells, seeds, hand tools, water pipes, etc. Incidentally we are also helping to feed people in the present Kenya emergency. In common with the much larger operators such as the United Nations and the Red Cross, we supply plant derived foods for direct human consumption - not cows or meat, which everybody with any sense knows would be nothing but a burden and a health risk.

It is sad that some people in the west are so hooked on their own blinkered life-styles that they cannot see that this is the way forward for the poor of Africa rather than encouraging them to fall into line behind them, walking in their own giant livestock shadows and treading in their own enormous carbon and methane footprints.

Animal agriculture is not efficient or sustainable. It is time for change!

Neville Fowler, Founder and Director. Help International Plant Protein Organisation The Old Vicarage, Llangynog Carmarthen SA33 5BS

Not Published**From Barry Miles**

Sir, There is a proper debate to be had about the promotion of livestock farming in Africa, and the accusation (letters 4th January) that Don Gwillim, "with breathtaking hypocrisy... would want Livestock's Long Shadow to fall more ... across Africa than across us" is very unfair. Don eschews animal products himself and campaigns within the climate change movement to get the global warming impact of the developed world's animal product consumption on the agenda.May I suggest that personal attacks be edited out of letters in future to keep the focus on the real issues?

Climate change hits the poor of the world most but, as Don has found, nearly all the high profile climate change organisations, including aid agencies, are highly resistant to even mentioning animal product consumption in developed world lifestyles. Don, on the other hand, lives out his principles and is the last who should be called a hypocrite. I should make clear that Don did not ask me to write this letter.

Incidentally, I agree with Mr. Chesworth's comment that we should not force our ethics on others. The three hundred animals a second slaughtered in the UK are having our ethics forced on them to the point of death.

Barry Miles, 39b Oakleigh Road, Hillingdon, Middlesex, UB10 9EN

8th February 2008***The Church must celebrate creation***

David L. Edwards proposes a new feast day in the shadow of climate change

IN 2008, the Church of England and the rest of the Anglican Communion will have an opportunity to be included in a new and definitely religious response to the familiar and certainly disastrous process of climate change. Already, many individuals, congregations, and synods have shown that they are well aware of the crisis, but this is a project to do what only Churches can do, nationally and internationally. It is proposed that, by the official arrangement of public worship, thanksgiving should be offered for the creation understood as ultimately the work of the Creator. It is also proposed that prayer should be offered for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to equip humans for the rescue of this planet that we have been busy wrecking.

Of course, Anglicans have other concerns. New beliefs about sexuality and gender may lead to the wrecking of our Communion. In the mission of the Church, "fresh expressions" of "being church" are vitally necessary. Lambeth 2008 must be placed in the context of the many hundreds of millions of God's children suffering from dire poverty and deadly diseases. Yet it is not controversial to say that all Christians need new expressions of faith if our situation as humans in 2008 can be expressed in a terrible phrase: "This planet has cancer and the cancer is us." Nor is it controversial to add that the power to hope and act must be received on our knees.

A NEW FESTIVAL is needed as a focus for this prayer, which must not be gloom about doom. Yet, so far, the only relevant addition to the Anglican church calendar has been the adoption of the feast of Christ the King, instituted by Pius XI in 1925. Alas, the collect now provided in the C of E's Common Worship makes that observance not very relevant. It prays that "the whole created order" will be brought to "worship at his feet". It is not merely naughty to ask how this is to be managed by stars, fish, animals, plants, deserts, oceans, and continents of ice. Here is poetry — and, after an extremely alarming diagnosis of physical reality by science, poetry is not enough. Obviously the current pope must have the most influence in the mobilisation of the world's Christians by prayer, but, in the early stages, other church leaders are entitled to take initiatives.

Recently, the Ecumenical Patriarch made a realistic proposal, drawing on the rich heritage of Orthodox theology, which emphasises "creation" as well as "salvation". He suggested that there should be a new concentration on the dangers by reflection and prayer in the period from 1 September to 4 October. This initiative has been endorsed by the European Ecumenical Assembly. In 2007, this brought together representatives of the Roman Catholic bishops' conferences, along-side Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican delegates. Surely it is to be hoped that many Churches will now respond, in Europe, but also in every nation around the world.

Yet it may also be asked whether it is wise to leave the period without any one festival that could be sufficiently dramatic to be treated by the media as news, and sufficiently arousing to be linked with the broadcasting of relevant music and spoken words. Even the regular supporters of the Churches could be stimulated and encouraged by special services in, for example, cathedrals; and even regular supporters of charities that are not specifically Christian could be reached by the idea that an extra stimulus is added when it is believed that what is being damaged is the result of the Creator's activity over long ages.

IT MAY also be asked whether pro-vision could be made for participation in their own ways by faith communities that do not regard Sunday as the holy day. On a Sunday, Christians; on a Saturday, Jews; and on a Friday, Muslims could explore what their scriptures and other parts of their heritage teach about the creation and its Creator. Of course, the smaller religions also believing in One God should be included. There would be no need to get involved in the problems of inter-faith worship, but many lasting benefits could result from this unprecedented festival as a response to an unprecedented threat.

If the idea is taken up widely, no doubt the administration needed must be the responsibility of great international institutions, such as the Vatican or the World Council of Churches, but it will always be to the credit of Anglicanism if it gives early support to a weekend festival. If, during 2008, the initiative taken by the Patriarch and endorsed by the European Assembly is also blessed by the C of E's House of Bishops and the General Synod, and by the Lambeth Conference, a ball will have been started on a roll that may touch many hearts and minds. There could be an impact on the globe, which humans inhabit, depend on, love, and mistreat. **The Very Revd Dr David L. Edwards is a former Provost of Southwark.**

8th February 2008 Lenten counsels come thick and (carbon) fast by Bill Bowder

"GIVE up some carbon for Lent" is one of the many suggestions for self-denial this year. It was the message of the Bishops of London and Liverpool when they launched Tearfund's Carbon Fast challenge in Trafalgar Square on Tuesday. The campaign is backed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who said that he is cutting down flying "drastically".

"There is a moral imperative on those of us who emit more than our fair share of carbon to rein in our consumption," the Bishop of Liver-pool, the Rt Revd James Jones, said. The Bishop of London, the Rt Revd Richard Chartres, also launched his diocese's "Education for All" Lent" appeal at St John's Primary School, Friern Barnet, on Wednesday. He hopes to raise £75,000 for education in Angola and Mozambique to support the Millennium Development Goal of universal education for all.

Church Action on Poverty (CAP) has prepared a free online "Just Church" programme for Lent (www.justchurch.info). Niall Cooper, national co-ordinator of CAP, said: "Local churches in the UK are becoming increasingly aware of the injustice and poverty that exists all around them."

On a different theme, the director of education for Blackburn diocese, the Archdeacon of Lancaster, the Ven. Peter Ballard, proposed that all the 200 C of E schools in Lancashire should give up emails for Lent and write letters and use the phone instead to cut stress levels.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have written a foreword to the C of E's . Love Life Live Lent2 booklet, which pro 50 actions of simple "neighbourly" love. There is a website: www.livelent.net.

The Revd Joel Edwards, who chairs the Churches' Media Council, has asked leaders to prepare their churches for the broadcast of the BBC1 series, The Passion, during Holy Week. It recommends the website www.rejesus.co.uk for people exploring the faith. #

Western Mail

11th December 2007 Insane blood bath on the Welsh hills

Sir — Insanity, insanity, insanity! The FUW are fully supporting the Wales "Welfare Scheme for Lambs".As a member of the union concerned I went to see them and told them that they have at least one member who is not happy. They told me I was the first to complain. Do the public realise that there is a blood bath of carnage going on in the hills of Wales?

As a member of the public and a Christian I could not keep quiet any more. There are up to 300,000 lambs from the hills of Wales being culled and none of their meat is being used. It is all incinerated. These are lambs which have been reared by farmers who have been up for hours in the night to see that they are born with their best welfare in mind. I'm sure these lambs are what Marks & Spencer call the best of the hills of Wales.

I do agree that we need a welfare scheme, but I do not agree with the way it is being run. The £15 per lamb should have gone to looking after the animal and bringing it to maturity. The £6.5m allocated should not have been used to incinerate up to 300,000 lambs when much of the world's population is starving. If the lambs had been looked after for a few months they would have been worth many millions of pounds and would have fed our nation. I predict that in a few months' time we will be importing thousands of tonnes of New Zealand lamb.

I am also devastated that the RSPCA will do nothing to stop the carnage. I have been on the telephone to their public affairs manager pleading for the life of the lambs. The conversation was ended abruptly with the comment, "I have not got time to talk, I have got to get on with my work." Let us not forget, the RSPCA will not let us cull one badger, which may be riddled with TB, but killing 300,000 lambs is OK.

What is the world coming to? And where is the animal rights movement? They are always where they are not wanted, such as calf exports and fox hunting, but the wasteful killing of 300,000 innocent lambs does not count. I appeal to the population of Wales and the UK. Please let us stand together against this carnage in the hills.

The scheme is to run until January 4 next year. It is run by Dunbia (Wales) Ltd. So let's have a few thousand letters to the Rural Affairs Minister Elin Jones. She agreed to the scheme and threw £6.5m of-our money into this wasteful bloodbath. Let each one of us get the message to the Welsh Assembly and Westminster.

DM JONES, Cynwil Elfed

The Tablet

1st September 2007

Clouds of witness by Michael Northcott

Pro-life should mean saying no to pollutants — yet recent contradictory events in the Vatican highlight continued confusion within the Catholic Church over ecological issues

The Catholic Church is blowing hot and cold on climate change. In April the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace held a conference in the Vatican to which it invited climate change sceptics from Italy, Britain and the United States; but only one scientist from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was invited to speak. He was followed by a range of scientists who claimed that climate science was not reliable and that industrial carbon dioxide is making the earth greener. These contributions were contradicted by others, such as Bishop James Jones, the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, who called on Pope Benedict XVI to speak publicly on climate change as an ethical challenge to Christians and people of faith. But Cardinal Renato Martino, who, as president of the Council, hosted the gathering, concluded by affirming the sceptics' claim that the science was too complex to be definitive, although he also stressed that the Church could develop a response to climate change from the resources of Catholic social teaching.

After the conference, Cardinal Martino spoke less guardedly, suggesting that incorrect use of the environment was sinful and that all religious groups have a duty to raise environmental awareness. As if in response to these words, the Vatican claimed at the end of July that it would be the first state to go "carbon neutral" as it had arranged for a new forest to be planted in Hungary to offset energy emissions and the flights of Vatican officials.

Yet this week, the new airline launched by the Vicariate of Rome had its inaugural flight, which, had Cardinal Camillo Ruini, vicar of the Diocese of Rome, on board. The low-cost airline, created in collaboration with a Italian budget airline that already flies the Vatican colours and carries cargo and post, will ferry pilgrims to Lourdes and eventually to other sacred sites. Planes have a greenhouse gas footprint of about 10 per cent of industrial emissions; with the growth in flying this footprint will by 2050 rival that of cars and trucks, currently the most polluting devices on the planet. Sponsorship of an airline for pilgrims hardly seems to indicate a moral response to the problem of global warming.

These events seem to indicate how deeply the Catholic Church is divided by the ecological crisis, and by global warming in particular. The principal social teaching of the Church on industrial development has been that it promotes the common good provided its fruits are justly distributed; the ecological consequences of development are rarely mentioned in Catholic social teaching, and no papal encyclical (so far) has addressed the environment. Many people of faith and their leaders, including for example Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, believe that abuse of the planet by industry is the biggest moral challenge facing modern humanity. But this view conflicts with the emphasis in modern Catholic social teaching on the calling to transform creation for human ends. On this account, exponential human population growth and the related growth in human pressure on ecosystems are divinely intended. Hence Pope John Paul II believed that the greatest moral challenge of modernity was not the ecological crisis, about which he rarely spoke, but rather threats to prenatal human life and efforts to restrain human population growth.

There are some who suggest that Pope Benedict XVI, who comes from a country with a tradition of green consciousness, will take a different approach to his predecessor. Bishop Uhl of Freiberg called on his fellow countryman to write a papal encyclical on the "future of Creation". But it is important to realise that such an encyclical would involve re-thinking Catholic responses to both industrial development and to ecology, especially the emphasis on human dominion.

In the United States, evangelicals and Catholics who have sought to mobilise the conservative religious right on the issue of climate change and environmental pollution have changed people's minds by suggesting that the properly pro-life position of conservative Christians needs to extend beyond a concern for prenatal life to a consideration of the effects of industrial pollution on the young, and on the yet unborn. Being consistently pro-life demands that such pollution is curtailed. Future generations of the yet unborn may well see their lives radically affected by the legacy of the excessive greenhouse gases that industrial consumers and corporations are emitting into the atmosphere. In other words, there is nothing pro-life about a moral position that claims to respect the unborn while permitting industrial pollutants to harm those who have yet to live. This is the ambiguous position in which many religious conservatives place themselves when they oppose state funding for family planning and state regulation of environmental toxins.

That humanly produced carbon dioxide is an environmental pollutant is still disputed by climate sceptics in the USA and elsewhere. But the clouds are increasingly witness to the reality that industrial carbon is changing the climate. When planes stopped flying over the United States for two days after 11 September 2001, the average temperature across the continent fell by 1°C because the cirrus clouds that jet trails form, and that trap emitted warmth from the earth's surface at night, dissipated. The clouds that gather in the strengthening storms which have brought ever more flooding and devastation to Bangladesh, the Caribbean

and even Britain this summer, witness that the science is no longer in dispute. Studies indicate that strengthening storms are connected to rising ocean surface temperatures. A paper published last month found that reduced rainfall in southern Europe and increased precipitation in northern Europe are closely linked to the increased carbon emissions of the last 40 years. The most pessimistic predict that parts of southern Spain, Greece and Italy will be desert within the next 40 years while Scotland will be exporting water to irrigate olive groves in southern England.

Nor is climate change a threat just to the future of life. Farmers in Africa from Mali to Malawi are already suffering from the drying of the continent which science shows is a result of the warming of the Indian Ocean in the last 20 years - a warming that has reduced the formation of rain clouds over Africa.

Yet, according to the International Energy Authority, the rate of greenhouse gas consumption continues to rise. At the heart of this continued rise is the refusal of economists, politicians and others to recognise that there is a direct link between economic growth, growth in consumption and growth in pollution. Until carbon emissions, and hence economic growth, are legally restrained, and our "consumer lifestyle" consigned to the history books, this pro-life planet remains at risk of becoming distinctly anti-life.

The groups of more than 2,000 scholars who produced the latest reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) represent all branches of the natural and human sciences in the modern university. And they have reached consensus. Industrial gases are changing the climate and industrial civilisation needs radical reform. I would argue that the IPCC is analogous to the ecumenical councils of the Church in the early centuries of the Christian era. Each report is as thoroughly argued over as the ancient creeds; and such broad consensus among scientists is a rare thing. The IPCC witnesses to what Al Gore has called an "inconvenient truth"

The truth is this: climate science reveals what Christians traditionally affirm when they gather for prayer and worship - that all human actions are connected, past, present and future. It is, in effect, like the cloud of witness-ers who participate in the worship of the Church across time and space. The earth system is a material analogy for this spiritual reality. We are all accountable, to God, to one another and to the yet unborn, for how we dwell on this pro-life planet. And we all stand in need of divine grace, and moral and spiritual conversion, if we are to use this earth wisely and well and conserve it for future generations.

■ *Michael Northcott is professor of ethics at the University of Edinburgh and author of A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming (Christian Aid and Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007).* #

8th September 2007

* Bitter harvest * by Raj Patel

The switch from fossil to biofuels is being encouraged by governments to combat global warming but emissions in their manufacture are worse than burning diesel. Now the quantity of land required is contributing to a worldwide shortage of food

Consumers in Britain have been warned that they will have to pay more for meat in the coming months as farmers pass on the increased cost of animal feed. Bread is going up too to keep pace with the rising cost of wheat. Elsewhere in the world the price of basic foods is already increasing. One recent report observed that the price of tortillas in Mexico had quadrupled, Indian food prices were up by over 10 per cent, and in China, the cost of pork rose by more than 40 per cent last year.

These price increases are just the beginning, as in the years to come the effects of a world food shortage will begin to bite. The latest warning came last week from 50 climate and soil scientists gathered in Iceland to discuss the future of the world's food production. The picture they painted was bleak. In the next 50 years, we'll need to produce more food as a species than in the past 10,000 years combined. And this is happening at the same time as soils are being degraded by intensive agriculture. As a result of more people demanding increasingly scarce food, prices are set to rise. It's a combination that bodes ill for the world's poor.

The first symptom to appear has been high grain prices. In part, wheat and maize prices are high because the harvest this year has been particularly poor - climate change has already taken a toll on some farming operations. There has been bad weather in important grain-growing areas such as Canada and parts of Europe. Soil degradation and water depletion also play a role. But, ironically, the new and forceful reason for the price rise lies precisely in a measure designed to prevent climate change - biofuels. With prices for maize at record highs, farmers are switching to growing it for the biofuels industry.

President Bush is keen to increase annual output to 35 billion barrels of biofuels within a decade. We might be more inclined to accept this if biofuels actually worked. But they do not. One recent study found that production of palm oil in South East Asia produced between two and eight times more carbon dioxide than burning diesel. The British Government's own advisers have cautioned against going down this road. But every government, including the British one, wants to be in on the act.

Biofuels - agrofuels is what environmental campaigners argue we should call them - are taking over. The Indian Government intends to plant 14 million hectares of them while Brazil is planning 120 million hectares,

and an African consortium is vying for 379 million hectares over 15 countries. This is the energy policy that our leaders have committed us to, despite evidence that it is irrational.

The competition between biofuels and food, you might think, leaves at least one clear set of winners - grain farmers. But even here, the situation is not clear. For biofuels to work, they need to be produced on an industrial scale. And that means growing them on plantations, and using cheap labour. Plantations are made by one of two means: either clearing virgin forest - which more than cancels out the carbon-reduction goal - or by taking land away from the poorest farmers, who are usually indebted, and ready to be bought out by large landowners just to keep the wolf from a the door.

In fact, the real winners here are not farmers at all, but food corporations. Today, the four companies that run our food supply are companies few of us have heard of - Con-Agra, Bunge, Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland. They remain mighty forces - hidden from us as consumers, but with the power to pit farmers across the world against one another. Emelie Peine, a United States-based soya farmer who was visiting Brazil when I interviewed her, put it like this: "Farmers need to understand why they're competing. The thing that made me realise this most is that Cargill is not only the largest exporter of US soybeans, but also the largest exporter of Brazilian soybeans. Farmers need to understand that every independent producer of tradable commodities in every country is being squeezed by the same companies and that the root of the problem is the corporate structure of the global agricultural economy."

The irony, as food prices rocket, is that the world's poorest people are those who work the land. Three out of four poor people in the developing world live in rural areas. Higher crop prices are going to increase income a little for those who can afford to bring their produce to market. But for the opportunity to be successful, a farmer needs to have land, access to loans to be able to invest in crops, and the technical support to be able to develop better farming systems. Those are things that the poorest agricultural workers can only dream of. Most are left to fend for themselves. The support that goes to industrial and corporate farming in the US, through the Farm Bill, and in Europe, through the Common Agricultural Policy, means that the poorest farmers, in both the developed and developing world, struggle to compete.

Around the world, farmers and landless people have been organising to reclaim our food system. Together, they have formed La Via Campesina - the peasant way - that pro-motes the idea that both farmers and consumers need to be more connected to our food. Currently based in Indonesia (although with origins in Latin America) and claiming up to 100 million members, it is a strong contender for being the world's largest social movement.

Progressive farmers' movements want to circumvent the industrial agricultural giants and deal with consumers directly. They want to be able to grow the food to feed the planet in a way that respects its producers, as well as deal with a range of issues, from direct farmer-to-farmer emergency relief work during disasters such as the Asian tsunami to lobbying the World Trade Organization and the alarm about human rights violations committed against the rural poor.

Their hope is that we'll connect with food more, and enjoy it more as a result. Recent research shows that children enjoy food more if it is wrapped in a McDonald's wrapper than if it's wrapped in brown paper. How much more would we enjoy food if we knew where it was grown, how, what was in it and how we were connected to it? A group of activists, artists and artisans realised this long ago in Italy, and started the Slow Food Movement. They want to enjoy food more by celebrating the labour that produces it with every morsel.

One important move is to eat less meat and fish, and consume more vegetables. It's sensible advice from a purely nutritional perspective, added to which there's certainly not enough land on earth to support a global population of six billion eating the amount of meat that we do in the developed world. But this isn't a hair-shirted movement; it is also tremendously enriching as well as a way of combating obesity - current trends suggest that by 2050 half of all British children will be overweight.

If there is to be more expensive food, let it be expensive not because it is grown in competition with biofuels, but because it reflects the true human cost of growing it, with farmers earning the income they are hungering for, in a society that allows its poorest members dignity and self-respect. That would be an outcome worth savouring.

■ **Raj Patel is a sociologist and political economist whose book *Stuffed and Starved: markets, power and the hidden battle for the worlds food system* (Portobello Books, £16.99) was published this week. See www.stuffedandstarved.org**

22nd September 2007

Green prayers for a beautiful world by Alex Kirby

Arguing that we need to develop a sense of sin when we offend against the natural world, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I led his latest interfaith environmental meeting last week in Greenland where the ice is melting at a 'phenomenal' rate

All that remains now of Tjodhilde's Church is a small horseshoe-shaped turf rampart, a modest memorial to a 1,000-year-old Christian site. Archaeologists believe the tiny building that stood here, 3.5 yards long and two across, was the first church in North America. It was built around 1000 AD by Tjodhilde, wife of Erik the Red, and last week it marked the end of an extraordinary twenty-first century Greenland odyssey.

It was the place chosen for the service celebrated by the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, titular leader of 250 Orthodox Christians, to conclude a week's intensive focus on the High North and what it portends for the rest of us. Standing with a Lutheran bishop in a bowl of green hills above the fjord, the patriarch brought to a formal end a symposium under the title "The Arctic: Mirror of Life", which had taken religious leaders, scientists and journalists 750 miles along Greenland's west coast.

The voyage had begun far to the north, at the town of Ilulissat It is a Unesco World Heritage Site and the place where one of Greenland's fastest-flowing glaciers finally reaches the sea. A few years ago the Sermeq Kujalleq glacier, thought to be the origin of the iceberg which sank the Titanic in 1912, was moving at several kilometres a year. By 2003 that had increased to 8kms, and it is now flowing at 15kms annually, nearly two metres an hour.

So Ilulissat was an obvious choice to start a week that focused on the accelerating rate of climate change. Standing in the bows of the *Fram*, the brand-new Norwegian cruise ship which hosted the symposium, the patriarch led a silent prayer for the planet. He was joined by the Pope's representative, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop emeritus of Washington, and by other leaders of Christian Churches, Judaism and Islam, and by Hindu, Shinto and Zen Buddhist leaders.

As the *Fram* stayed a respectful distance from the jumble of icebergs drifting slowly out to sea from the face of the glacier, the group stood united in reflection under a grey sky with scarcely an overcoat between them. The day was not cold. Greenland and the rest of the Arctic are warming fast.

The patriarch said he had prayed "for the planet and for the Earth, for salvation of life and heart, for the coming generation, and for Creation". Cardinal McCarrick told me that climate change was "an utmost priority", and that the symposium reminded the faithful of all religions that they had the opportunity to put pressure on legislators. "It's my hope that in the US this message will be seen and heard by all those we've chosen to lead us," he said.

Sofie Petersen, the 51-year-old Lutheran Bishop of Greenland, said the change in the climate locally had become apparent: "The sun is much hotter now. It bums very strongly and hurts your skin. When I was a child I could stay outside much longer. There's been a big change in the last 10 years."

The 67-year-old Bartholomew, elected in 1991 as leader of the 250 million-strong world-wide Orthodox community, is a Turkish citizen though ethnically of Greek descent His commitment to the environment has been evident from early in his patriarchate - some observers believe it shows the influence of his predecessor, Demetrios I - and Bartholomew has signed joint declarations on the environment with the late Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Within three years of his election, he had organised the first of a series of international environmental seminars, and 1995 saw the first of his ship-borne symposia. That year it was held in the Aegean, marking the 1,900th anniversary of the Book of Revelation. It drew up the seven Patmos Principles, intended as steps for action: notably, one of them argues that we need to develop a sense of sin when we offend against the Earth and the natural world.

In his opening address to this year's symposium, the patriarch himself verged on the apocalyptic. He began with a warning that "the danger of an avoidable environmental catastrophe is now more acute than ever". All was not yet lost, he said: "Neither our scientific friends nor our fellow leaders of the world of faith would have come to Greenland if we thought the future of the planet was utterly hopeless."

But his conclusion was stark: "Senior figures from many religious traditions have offered up, each in his own way, a silent prayer for the future of our beautiful world, for the people who live on Earth now, and for the generations that will succeed us, assuming that human folly does not destroy life on earth altogether."

Yet the symposium managed often to be a source of hope, when religious demarcation lines seemed unimportant and faith and science could recognise how much they share. At Cardinal McCarrick's simple Mass on board the *Fram*, the lessons were read by a Lutheran bishop and an Orthodox deacon, and the Greenlandic choir included a leading geologist.

Most of Greenland is covered in ice, in places several miles thick. If you look at an atlas you will find huge swathes of white space marked simply "Area Unexplored". But scientists are steadily unpacking the ice cap's secrets. Professor Robert Corell chairs the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, the definitive study of what is happening in the region. He describes the rate of melting on the ice cap as 'just phenomenal'.

As the growing warmth of the air melts more of the ice, the water has to go somewhere. Until recently glaciologists had thought it simply trickled down to the sea. But they have now found that much of it pours down through cracks in the ice to form a slippery and unstable layer above the bedrock.

"It's as if we're applying oil to the bottom of the glacier," says Dr Corell. "We can now see down to the base of the ice cap by radar, and at one spot there's 500 metres of water sitting under the ice. It's massive, it's accelerating, and it could be catastrophic, triggering an abrupt change.

"And abrupt events do happen. We filmed one piece of ice moving five kilometres in 90 minutes. It's the rate of change that matters more than the actual numbers. We're adding fresh water to the ocean far faster than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicted earlier this year. We're looking at a sea-level rise by 2100 not of up to 60cms, the IPCC figure, but at the best part of a metre - and some estimates are double that."

Terry Callaghan is professor of Arctic ecology at the universities of Sheffield and Lund in Sweden. He echoes Dr Corell's warning: "The overall message is that we're seeing very big changes in Arctic biological systems, some of them sudden. We're more worried about these step changes than about the ones we can predict. Forests are replacing the tundra. That's good news in the sense that the trees will soak up carbon dioxide. But it means a huge change in albedo, or reflectivity: dark trees will absorb heat instead of reflecting it back into space as ice and snow would. So it will mean a net warming."

Greenland used to be part of Denmark. 'Before home rule there was huge Danish paternalism says Minik Rosing, a Greenlander who is professor of geology at the University of Copenhagen. "Until the Second World War Greenlanders were not even allowed to own a kerosene lamp."

Now there are different problems. You can reach coastal communities by boat, or - if you can afford it - by helicopter, though most of those are booked solid during the summer months by diamond prospectors. But for most people the only way to get around is by dog sled. And neither dogs nor sleds can cope with warmer weather and thinning ice.

There are more fundamental changes afoot, caused not by climate but by the winds and ocean currents, which carry pollutants up from Europe, Asia and North America. Two Scandinavian scientists say twice as many girls are being born as boys across much of the Arctic, and they suspect pollution is to blame.

Dr Lars-Otto Reiersen, who heads the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, and Dr Jens Hansen, director of the Centre of Arctic Environmental Medicine at the Danish University of Aarhus, examined mothers and children in five Russian regions. They analysed the amount of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls, known to cause cancer in animals and to affect their nervous, reproductive and immune systems) that the women had ingested. In Russia, they say, high PCB levels are definitely to blame for skewed sex ratios, and they suspect this is true in Greenland and Canada as well.

In one area, Dr Reiersen said, "when the mother had an average of 2-4 micrograms of PCBs or more per litre of blood, we found she bore on average two girls for every boy." Many male infants were sickly or weighed less than normal. PCB levels are 10 times higher in parts of Greenland than in Russia. The pollutants accumulate as they pass up the food chain. Some are endocrine disrupters, chemicals that mimic sex hormones.

Aqqaluk Lynge, president of the Inuit Circumpolar Council and himself a Greenlander, said: "This is a disaster, especially for some 1,500 people who make up the Inuit nations in the far north-east of Russia. In the north of Greenland, near the Thule American airbase, only girl babies are being born to Inuit families. This has become a critical question of people's survival, but few governments want to talk about the problem of hormone mimickers, because it means thinking about the chemicals you use."

People living on the coast are at particular risk because the pollution builds up in the blubber of the seals and whales that many Inuit eat. Pregnant women are being advised to avoid this traditional diet, although obesity is a growing problem in Greenland because of increasing reliance on imported foods such as chips and Cola.

As the *Fram* sailed the last few miles before its passengers disembarked, the patriarch gave his final address. He said, "If there is one single message, it is this: time is short. Humanity does not have the luxury of quarrelling over racial or economic or political matters. May God grant us the wisdom to act in time."

■ **Alex Kirby is a former BBC environment correspondent. He is now a freelance writer specialising in environmental affairs.**

Methodist Recorder

30th August 2007

Animal abuse and human violence by Louise Clark

IN 1780, philosopher Immanuel Kant considered the possibility that the way a human being treats animals could reflect their treatment of other human beings. The debate has resurfaced and a conference to investigate the link between human and animal abuse, the motivations behind abusive behaviour and the consequences of this for humans; animals, society and legislators.

Animals are a controversial subject. Although few would say animal welfare is unimportant, those involved in the animal welfare network feel they are facing an uphill struggle. The amount of suffering that animals endure is vast and mainly inflicted by human beings or is the effect of human activity. Clearly, if an individual is suffering pain, that pain and suffering matters to that individual, whether they are human or animal.

Humans have to realise that it is not only human interests that should be taken into account whenever animals are involved.

Exists

Kant, however, had argued that animals exist "only as means to human ends," meaning our duty to refrain from harming animals is an indirect duty towards fellow human beings. If we are being cruel to animals, we are more likely to be cruel to other human beings which means we ought not to be cruel to animals. Clearly, an attitude of indifference to the suffering of fellow creatures may, in turn, signify a lack of compassion when faced with the suffering of fellow human beings.

However, a question can be raised regarding the inherent cruelty of actions. If cruelty is considered to be wrong against human beings, it seems that cruel actions against animals should be wrong simply because they are cruel. There is no need for the further step relating to the way such cruel individuals treat their fellow human beings. In other words, unless it is wrong in itself to harm the animal, it is hard to see why such an act would lead people to do other acts that are also wrong.

Nevertheless, the important truth contained within Kant's view is that evidence exists to suggest that violence against human beings has been preceded by violence against animals. Robert Ressler an FBI serial killer profiler has claimed that "murderers very often start out by killing and torturing animals as kids". The Oxford conference will allow academics to explore both the reality that there are human beings who deliberately cause suffering to animals and the implications of this.

Acknowledge

Those who subscribe to any religious faith, but particularly Christianity, in which a loving God is at the core, will need to acknowledge that animals are part of creation which matters to the creator. Religion therefore, has a role to play in contributing to the raising of awareness about animal issues. Awareness puts pressure on individuals to behave responsibly to animals and in turn, creates a more compassionate individual.

It is hoped that the conference will highlight the importance of animal welfare and instil an attitude of compassion for animals within society. This could, in turn, lead to a more compassionate society as a whole.

For more information about the conference on the theme "Relationship between Animal Abuse and Human Violence" in Oxford on September 8, contact the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics (tel: 020 7089 5216; e-mail: oxfordconference@oxfordanimalethics.com).

• *Louise Clark is communications officer of the League Against Cruel Sports.*

20th December 2007

MR Comment - Christmas and creation

SNOW-covered scenes of familiar views along with rather less contemporary vignettes of skaters on frozen rivers are the sort of images that are brought to popular attention as Christmas cards arrive. The linkage of snow and frost to Christmas are for many people as essential as any other part of the festival, even by creating artificial snow to enable a children's fairground ride appear more seasonal or a soap opera more realistic.

Any notion of a white Christmas is, in this country, a myth that seems to be successfully perpetuated even though few can remember it and the likelihood of it happening this year is a long way off. That it was once not a myth causes us to observe the combinations of natural changes in weather patterns as well as paying particular attention to the changes in the earth's temperature. It would seem that the issue of climate change is never far from the consequences of our actions or even the remembrance of, things past.

Backdrop

This year the arrival of snow-dusted scenes was taking place against the backdrop of the two-week United Nations Climate Change conference in Bali, as well as former American Vice-President Al Gore receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace as a result of raising awareness of the consequences of climate change induced by human beings.

Christmas cards, along with familiar phrases from carols such as "earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone", may hold a somewhat tenuous link to the actual context of Christ's birth. They do, however, contain a

strong reminder of the cosmic nature of Christ; of God's action in creation and the world as belonging to God and being the context in which we are shaped and consequently encounter God.

Targets

The "Bali road map" initiates a process of negotiations that will agree a new set of emissions targets, replacing those set in the Kyoto Protocol. That the process will take two years and that the road map contains no specific targets is a disappointment when so many in the world are facing the negative reality of climate change.

A survey revealing the damaging carbon emissions based on the transportation of traditional food for Christmas lunch is a further reminder of the need for personal responsibility and action. Sacrificial giving is not simply about a few extra pounds in the collection box when the carol-singers call. The true sacrifice of our lifestyle is directed to God as we seek to live lives of honour and service. Fundamental to that is care for creation and a commitment to justice for all our brothers and sisters, all with whom we share bread.

Respect

The incarnation requires attention to our relationships here on earth and that will always influence how we make decisions about the way we heat our homes, eat, purchase clothes, take holidays and travel. All have an effect on our brothers and sisters. All that we have comes from God and all that we do signifies how we love God and care for his creation. The global village is not simply about communication, it is also about caring and respecting the other, much like a local village that can only function with respect and honour of other people.

The celebration of Christ's birth- is as much about the public proclamation of the depth of God's love that is made manifest in human form as it is the private devotion of our hearts as we kneel in wonder. Christmas does not permit us to exclude or forget, not even during our own celebrations. Our celebration is only complete when we gather with all God's people and bring the concern of everyone, understanding that they are the concerns of the Christ-child who - ever lives to pray for us and who ever challenges us to care and speak out in love. #

17th January 2008

Battery Farming Concerns

POULTRY farmers are making the transition to free-range eggs but existing production systems should not be written off as unfair or cruel just because animals or birds are housed, according to the director of the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC), Methodist minister the Rev Dr Gordon Gatward.

As farmers prepare themselves for the phasing out, sooner rather than later, of battery farmed eggs, there was a clear indication of the risks to which birds raised outside may be exposed.

The deadly avian flu virus H5NI which struck at the Abbotsbury swannery near Chesil Beach in Dorset, the second highly pathogenic case detected among wild birds in the British Isles, presents a dilemma for poultry-keepers. Dr Gatward said: "It is easy to disagree with 'intensive' systems without actually realising how they give protection to the animal or bird."

The Government has confirmed that Britain will press ahead with outlawing the production of battery-farmed eggs by 2012. As some farmers claimed they need more time to adjust, the Environment Secretary Hilary Benn said he had been under some pressure to postpone the pro-posed European Union ban.

Meanwhile farmers are faced with demands for improved production standards allowing birds more space, freedom and access to natural light. Extra space gives birds room to flap their wings and have a more natural existence. Straw bales in sheds allow them to perch and peck.

Publicity

Dr Gatward said producers had been working towards the ending of battery-farmed eggs for quite a while. It was known about for some time, but publicity on television seemed to have made people "twitchy" about battery farming once again. Considerable adaptation costs had to be considered during the phasing-out period. Producers were the ones under pressure because prices were being pushed down all the time while the cost of feed had shot up due to increasing cereal prices.

When asked About intensive production of birds for meat, often a deep litter barn system, the ARC director said: "I get very concerned about what is meant by 'intensive' because the word is very emotive. I would rather consider a system as it is being applied. There are some very good systems and very good husbandry that some people tend to call 'intensive'. Alongside issues raised by the forthcoming ban on battery-farmed eggs, the import of livestock and poultry products from certain countries into Britain continues to anger everyone in the farming industry, said Dr Gatward.

He said: "This is not just regarding poultry. We have it with Brazilian beef at the moment. We are importing products from countries that use systems which are illegal in the UK. UK producers are, at the same time, being told they have to produce in an environment of high levels of welfare which inevitably increase costs and make products more expensive to put on the market.

"Retailers remain free to buy from wherever they wish, even where systems do not meet such high welfare conditions and products are therefore cheaper. This causes a lot of irritation within the industry."

Welfare

The environment department, Defra, estimates that 63 per cent of eggs produced in the UK are from battery farms while 32 per cent are from free-range. Animal welfare campaigners claim each battery hen has a space which is often smaller than an A4 sheet of paper.

Lifelong poultry-keeper, member of the Worshipful Company of Poulterers and supernumerary minister in East Anglia the Rev Ray Trudgian studied Christian ethics and modern methods of animal husbandry.

He said: "I am all for high levels of welfare: guidelines have certainly improved things and there are some excellent units in Norfolk where it could be argued that the birds are kept warm, safe and dry. When those systems are managed well they will work. I have seen a lot of systems in operation and the ones that work are the ones where people really care for their flock."

Mr Trudgian said that poultry-keepers faced something of a dilemma when considering switching to free-range flocks because of risks from outbreaks of avian flu as seen in Dorset and earlier experiences in Norfolk and Suffolk.

In view of a further outbreak of bird flu virus and a likely re-emergence of blue tongue disease in cattle later this year, Dr Gatward said farmers should be aware of the support systems available. Anyone anxious about their own situation or feeling anxious about someone else should contact Farm Crisis Network, tel: 01788 510866 #

Unpublished

John Gilheany's answer to 'A load of hot air?'

Western Mail 3rd Dec 2007

Sir, - I almost wish I could share A. Phillips' seasoned sense of inverted snobbery towards the readership of The Lancet but a reluctant tendency to revere the scientific mind usually gets in the way.

However, I have not referred readers of the Western Mail to that particular publication but to a Vegetarian Society booklet written in everyday language. It could have been the campaigning materials, or website, of any major vegetarian organisation these days. In every case their resources emphasise the general scientific consensus that livestock farming is detrimental to the planet.

Earlier in the year the vegetarian, or rather vegan, position received grudging government assent when a leaked e-mail from the Environment Agency revealed that DEFRA were considering the recommendation of 'key environmental behaviour changes' which would focus on a reduction in meat consumption.

Similarly, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals have been hounding AI Gore for several months over this particularly inconvenient truth and not without an overwhelming amount of scientific evaluation behind their strategy.

At the root of it all is a report which was published in November 2006 by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation. Livestock's Long Shadow concluded that "Livestock's contribution to environmental problems is on a massive scale. The impact is so significant that it needs to be addressed with urgency."

A. Phillips' interesting portrait of idyllic farmyard scenes and his or her concerns about a shortage of 'well rotted manure' is rather unfounded given the vast quantities of toxic effluent that result from factory farming every year.

Indeed it is highly unlikely that major ethical or environmental concerns will ever reach the consciousness of the majority of human beings. The burden of responsibility therefore rests upon those capable of discerning the real value of life on earth.

In that sense the sums seem to suggest that if environmentalists, the 'compassionate' and otherwise intelligent individuals were to shun slaughterhouse products then the impact of the ignorant would at least be less of a menace in terms of global warming.

It's when those with the sense and a capacity for concern become part of the problem that the planet is left with little hope.

John M. Gilheany