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Affiliated Ministry
CVA (USA)

WHAT THE CHRISTIAN PAPERS SAY

May 2007

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All members

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

Closing dates:

7th January (for Sept. to Dec. cuttings), **7th May** (for Jan. to April cuttings)
and **7th September** (for May to August cuttings).

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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, and then 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.

This current edition reflects the concern of the Catholic Press regarding global warming. It is interesting to note the complete lack of concern in the Anglican press over this period.

Unpublished letters

Many of us spend hours researching and writing unpublished letters to the Christian press.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Please send to CVAUK any unpublished letters, together with a copy of the letter / article that initiated your letter, for possible inclusion in future CVAUK press compilations.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 Tablet

27th January 2007

Is the climate changing in Rome?

By Sean McDonagh

Two major Vatican departments are to hold a summit on global warming, when the Church, after decades of saying little, will have a golden opportunity to present to the world clear ethical teaching on protection of the planet. It could see the start of a new moral order.

On 17 January, the doomsday clock, which has been drawing attention to our possible atomic annihilation since 1947, was moved two minutes closer to midnight. The reason for moving the clock forward to five to 12 was not merely because of the renewed threat of nuclear war, but also because the scientists judged that climate change is a serious threat to the survival of human civilisation. During the same week, it emerged that the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is, together with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, planning a summit on climate change later this year. If the Catholic Church took a lead role in tackling climate change it would make an enormous difference to the lives of millions today and all future generations. So far, the Vatican has been slow to embrace climate change. Scientists have known about the deleterious effects of global warming for decades. As long ago as the late 1970s, "The Global 2000 Report to the President", commissioned by President Jimmy Carter, discussed the "greenhouse" effect and predicted that the warming of the Earth's atmosphere would lead to extreme weather patterns and a rise in the level of the oceans, causing flooding in many of the world's most densely populated areas. The report identified the emissions of carbon dioxide mainly from industrial societies as the main cause of climate change.

Even 20 years later, the Vatican and most episcopal conferences had little to say about the various reports from the International Panel on Climate Change. IPCC scientists claimed that a reduction of between 60 and 80 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions was necessary to stabilise the global climate. Other religious communities were more alert to the crisis. The World Council of Churches (WCC) produced an excellent document in 1993 entitled "Time of Peril: Test of Faith". Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 1996, was aware of this. He wrote to the presidents of episcopal conferences in industrialised countries acknowledging the leading role that the WCC had taken in drawing the attention of its member Churches to the relationship between climate change and human activity. He encouraged local Churches to examine ways in which they could cooperate with any WCC-inspired initiative in their country. To the best of my knowledge nothing happened.

Then, in 2004, The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church was published at a time when there was a consensus among scientists that human-induced climate change was happening. Nevertheless, only one paragraph is devoted to climate change, and it fails to capture both the magnitude of climate change and the urgency with which it must be faced. At that time there was a growing consensus among climate scientists that we had, at the most, 20 years to take decisive, mitigating action. Otherwise we will have reached an irreversible "tipping point".

There is a richness within Catholic social teaching that can form the ethical basis for dealing with climate change, which includes viewing climate change in the context of the protection of the common good, which in turn must include protecting habitats, ecosystems and the biosphere. The preferential option for the poor is particularly important because those who are least responsible for causing climate change, such as the people in Bangladesh, are destined to suffer most. Equitable ways must be found to compensate and accommodate them.

Climate change points to the ethical issues involved in intergenerational justice. The irresponsible use of fossil fuel by two or three generations can have irreversible consequence for all future generations. Concern for the wider earth community is also part of this new moral order. Scientists reckon that climate change will push one million species over the precipice of extinction.

It is vital for the success of the Rome summit that the process leading up to the consultation be both competent and transparent. One crucial test of the bona fides of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace will be whether the invited scientists and theologians are independent and competent. Will the involvement of the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences ensure that this requirement is met? Unfortunately, there is a precedent for fearing this will not be the case.

In September 2004, the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences and the United States Embassy to the Holy See held a one-day seminar in the Gregorian University in Rome entitled Feeding the World; The Moral Imperative of Biotechnology. All the speakers were avid promoters of genetic engineering and a number had close connections with agribusiness corporations, such as Monsanto, which are poised to make billions of dollars from controlling genetically engineered and patented seeds of the staple foods of the world. Despite the fact that people such as Bishop Dinualdo Gutierrez in the Philippines, Cardinal Owen McCann in South Africa and numerous bishops in Brazil were opposed to genetically modified organisms, no speaker was chosen to present that perspective so as to have a genuine debate.

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace should take as its example Australia, where the episcopal conference worked hand in hand with independent scientists and competent theologians to produce one of the best Catholic statements on climate change. It must also work closely with the WCC and be humble enough to recognise that this organisation has much more expertise on the ethics and religious dimension of this issue than the Vatican.

This is a golden opportunity for the Catholic Church to make the Gospel of Jesus relevant to young people by addressing contemporary issues. Hopefully, the Spirit will inspire those in authority to give effective leadership in this crucial area, literally for the life of the world.

Sean McDonagh is a Columban Missionary. His latest book is Climate Change: the challenge to us all (Columba Publications).

27th January 2007

Tablet Comment - A Global Imperative

It would be nice to think that President George W. Bush decided to take global warming seriously only when he heard that the Vatican was about to do so, with a world conference later this year. Both the White House and the Holy See have been in denial so far, with Mr Bush taking comfort in various alternative and increasingly weak explanations for what scientists can plainly see on their thermometers, and the Vatican - which purportedly "thinks in centuries" - hoping that the planet will eventually cool down again. But Mr Bush's State of the Union address this week contained a definite U-turn. In order not just to save fuel for political reasons, but so as to protect the environment, Americans were being told to cut their use of petrol by 20 per cent in 10 years.

That will not have pleased the oil lobby, to whom Mr Bush's administration has often seemed to be in hock. Nor has Mr Bush hidden behind the "threat to American jobs" with which he justified his rejection of the Kyoto treaty. Perhaps he realises that in the very long term, unless something is done, there might not be any Americans, with jobs or without.

The Vatican appears to have been encouraged in its planning by Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer and putative next Prime Minister, who has realised as few politicians before him how Rome can be used to pursue ethical British foreign policy aims.

That looks like a mutually beneficial discovery. Although details are not yet certain, the likely conference or seminar would take place later this year in Rome under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. The leading experts on global climate change would take part, and obviously such an occasion would be more complete if it included a major address from Pope Benedict. It is overdue.

This Pope has added little to the corpus of social doctrine bequeathed by his predecessor, and even John Paul II's last major statement, *Centesimus Annus*, was 16 years ago, before climate change caught the world's attention. There is a gap where strong teaching should go, and even such bodies as the World Council of Churches have outrun the Catholic Church in this area.

What makes it as much a social justice issue as a scientific one is the inevitability that it will be the poor in every continent who suffer first and most, as the climate heats up, polar ice melts and sea levels rise. Indeed, it is happening already. And if the White House now admits that global warming is caused partly by human activity, the Vatican should not find its guest list swamped by those paid to deny it, in the way that an earlier Vatican conference on genetic engineering found it-self populated by spokesmen for the (mainly American) corporations with a profitable stake in genetic engineering.

The scientific basis for global warming has at last achieved global recognition, just as scientists are revisiting their calculations and measurements and deciding that the crisis is even worse than they thought it was. But the ethical imperative demands something more than the best science can offer: it demands world moral leadership as perhaps only a Pope can give, to show how present generations bear a heavy responsibility for the well-being of future generations. #

3rd February 2007

Bishop seeks ban on human-animal embryos

By Thomas Norton

THE BISHOPS' Conference of England and Wales has called for the creation of human-animal hybrids to be prohibited "for the foreseeable future". The Linacre Centre for Healthcare Ethics this week submitted evidence on behalf of the bishops to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, which is conducting a six-week consultation on the Government's plans to regulate the creation of hybrid or chimera embryos.

Dr Helen Watt, director of the centre, said that a ban on hybrid embryo research was "highly desirable" and described the research as a "clinical dead-end". The Government is preparing to introduce draft legislation in March on reform of the 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act. In December a White Paper proposed banning the creation of chimeras although it left the door open for future research. The Linacre Centre, a bioethics research institute under the trusteeship of the Catholic Trust for England and Wales, said it would urge that chimeras be prohibited, adding that it was a matter of "basic moral prudence" to avoid creating an embryo whose moral status was ambiguous. #

February 2007

Act now to combat global warming, US conference tells Congress

CLIMATE CHANGE should be considered a moral challenge that transcends ideology, the United States bishops' conference told Congress last week, urging the Government to help alleviate global warming's effects, especially on the poor, writes Tim Lavin. "We believe the moral measure of debate ... on climate change will be how we act with prudence to protect God's creation, advance the common good, and mitigate the ways that climate change and its remedies burden the poor and the vulnerable; wrote Bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the bishops' international policy committee.

The bishops, he said in a letter to congressional leaders, will participate in this debate "not as climate experts or as scientists, but rather as pastors and teachers who fear that the moral and human dimensions of these decisions will be overwhelmed by political, economic or ideological pressures".

President George W. Bush, whose administration had professed scepticism about global warming, acknowledged in his State of the Union address last month that climate change had become a "serious challenge". The bishops have warned about global warming before. In a detailed 2001 policy statement, the conference urged the US Government to show leadership on the issue and emphasised America's obligation to help poorer nations. "We bishops believe that the atmosphere that supports life on earth is a God-given gift, one we must respect and protect," the statement said. "It unites us as one human family." #

February 2007

Green issues are grounded in Bible, says bishop

Mark Brolly In Melbourne

CONCERN ABOUT the environment could become a "pseudo-religion" if the Church's strong spiritual and biblical traditions of caring for the Earth are not recognised, an Australian bishop has warned.

Bishop Christopher Toohey, chairman of the Australian Bishops' Commission for Justice and Service, told The Tablet that Catholics would not be true to their own tradition if they approached the ecological crisis without a firm theological and spiritual base.

"Sometimes an interest in the environment can become a bit of a pseudo-religion ... whereas we have a strong spiritual tradition and a biblical one for care of the environment," Bishop Toohey said.

He said the Church was "behind the game" in terms of its use of energy, with many church buildings being old and wasteful of energy, but it could draw on a rich source of teaching from Scripture, and saints such as Clare and Benedict.

Bishop Toohey's diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes is one of the areas worst affected by the 10-year drought afflicting much of Australia. The bishop also said that Mass attendance in one town, Bourke, had fallen because the drought was causing people to leave the area. The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has launched an appeal to help rural communities. #

February 2007

Bird Flu outbreak raises moral issue

The outbreak of bird flu in Norfolk surely highlights dangers of intensive food production. We've had infected eggs, BSE in beef and the unknown dangers of genetically modified crops. Our supermarkets offer an obscene range of products in the interests of so-called choice, yet our population has never been so unhealthy, much of it caused by over-eating. It's high time the Catholic Church made food production a moral issue. **G. Waterson**, Dudley #

February 2007

Climate - action that will stick

Sean McDonagh's article ("Is the Climate Changing in Rome?", 27 January) is greatly to be welcomed. He rightly notes that scientists have been warning us of the disastrous effects of global warming for almost three decades. But has he or anyone else in the Catholic hierarchy taken note of the fact that none of the summit conferences on climate change (Rio, Kyoto, Johannesburg, etc) has produced other than non-binding agreements to aim at what, in view of scientific estimates (between 60 and 80 per cent), are totally inadequate reductions of CO2 emissions; and that even these have been rejected by the most populous and powerful nations? Nor as yet has any significant action been taken.

The reason for this dilatoriness is that the nations always give priority to what they regard as their own national economic interests. Being sovereign (i.e. in practice and in theory subject to no superior legislation), even when subject to such agreements, they can

disregard or renounce them at any time. Hence, the only way to overcome such reluctance to implement ad-equate measures for counteracting global warming is to substitute for the United Nations (which is committed by Article 2 of its charter to uphold and respect the sovereignty of its members) a form of world government, that can uphold the rule of law worldwide. If the Roman summit is to have any considerable effect, it will have to advocate this change unequivocally and emphatically.

(Professor) Errol E. Harris Ambleside, Cumbria erro lharris @ic24.net

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10th February 2007

Ways to live the good life

By Catherine Cowley

Religion, and especially Christianity, has been seen as part of the problem rather than the solution to tackling climate change. But that is to misrepresent the gift and task of 'dominion' over the earth

Some scepticism greeted the announcement that the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace will be convening an international summit to look at the threat of climate change, as discussed in *The Tablet* by Sean McDonagh under the headline "Is the climate changing in Rome?" a fortnight ago. What contribution can such a summit make when, it is argued, Christianity is so much part of the problem? Critics point to the way in which God is portrayed in Genesis as commanding "do-minion" over the earth, and they suggest that this has been a cause of the attitudes that have led us to where we are now. They also maintain that Catholic opposition to population control will make the situation worse: the plan-et cannot support a larger population.

So, what contribution can religion make? Before responding to those criticisms, it's worth looking at a common theme of advocates for action to tackle climate change: motivation by guilt (look at what your consumption is doing to the planet), and fear (if you don't do anything about it, awful things will happen).

I do not underestimate the motivating power of guilt and fear. They can kick-start action when nothing else will. But they are no good for the long haul, for stimulating deep-seated change. Negative emotions fade over time; they prompt action only until we have done enough to dull their nagging. What we need are motivations that inspire us to em-body in our actions the values that we hold to be important. But what are those motivations? How are they to be kept going?

It is precisely here that religion, instead of being the problem, can be a big part of the solution. It is true that biblical texts have been used to try to justify exploitation and thought-less misappropriation of Creation, but a bet-ter understanding of Scripture has helped us to see that this is not what the gift and task of "dominion" means.

It is also true that there is considerable resistance on the part of the Church to many , (not all) methods of population control. The size of the population is not an irrelevant consideration, but if we have only comparatively few years in which to act, it is a red herring. No action that is taken now will reduce the population significantly in time, and we must not be distracted from the underlying issue of over-consumption. The West is the main problem, closely followed by China.

Politics has difficulties in tackling the problem of climate change. Given that con-temporary politics is predicated on delivering economic growth, it cannot tackle the issue of consumption. To advocate a reduction in living standards and the rationing of resources would be electoral suicide. We cannot look to politics to bring about the necessary pro-found change in attitudes. So could religion be more significant for achieving such a change and introducing new values?

Christianity's commitment to the relationship between poverty, justice and the husbanding of resources is well recognised, and many other religions are also rich in sustained reflections on stewardship of the environment and the just distribution of the world's goods. There are good reasons to ask what various faiths can offer regarding the environment.

In March the Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life will begin work with a small group of people from Muslim, Jewish and Christian backgrounds on a project called "Faiths in Creation". Its interfaith character is important for a variety of reasons. In practical and political terms, drawing in a wider range of people than any single tradition can reach will greatly increase our impact. This is not only at the level of individual action and commitment; social change hap-pens more readily when there is an in-formed citizenry prepared to take political action. In social terms, it will be good to see that religions with different traditions can co-operate for the common good.

For Catholics, though, there is also a deeper theological motivation for the interfaith dimension, especially in the context of our relationship with Creation. The Catholic idea of community differs radically from the often insipid version offered up in the media. Human persons are social beings, relational beings created in the image and likeness of God. God, however, is not a monad, but a Trinitarian communion. To understand human society properly we have to use analogy. It will be something like that sort of communion which is God. Because the Catholic under-standing of community sees it rooted in the Trinity, reaching unity in the Spirit, it is deeply Catholic (even if not always seen in practice) to collaborate with others, to be humble enough to listen, to act in charity together.

Some shared understanding between the three faiths already exists. Each begins from belief in God as freely creating the universe, a creation which is the initial gift of God. They also acknowledge the need to respond to creation as a gift, not treat it simply as a given. Each tradition, however, structures the connection of human beings and God differently. Certainly there will be some common ground - and the hope is that the common gound will increase by the end of the project. But the intention is not to identify a single, bland position, so blurred that nobody can disagree because nobody can see clearly what it is. Rather, it is to enable each tradition to illuminate the other. For example, each of the traditions has an understanding of stewardship, but they are not identical.

Other issues include: what is our responsibility to future generations? What do our traditions say about just distribution of the world's goods? What enables us to draw confidence in times of uncertainty? And we will also be looking to see what deformations are present: for example, to what extent do religious beliefs encourage conspicuous consumption?

We are all called to respond to a new development within our culture, where standard secular assumptions about what constitutes "the good life" are being challenged. Christianity has a long and deep tradition of reflection on social questions, and so too, in different ways, have Judaism and Islam, and the relationship between God, humanity and Creation is also a key element in the non-Abrahamic faiths.

If we, as members of the major faith traditions, do not play our part, then religion will not only have failed to make its unique contribution to the future of our society; we will have failed to defend all those who are weak, poor or otherwise vulnerable in the face of the natural disasters, famine, massive migration, conflict over water and other scarce re-sources, and falling standards of living that threaten us all. Religion will have failed to be what it should be in society. (See also review, God is Green, below.)

■ Dr Catherine Cowley is associate director of the Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life at Heythrop College, University of London. Material from this project will be available online at www.heythrop.ac.uk/HIREPL

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10th February 2007**God is Green**

What a pity we can't wire Mark Dowd to the National Grid. All that clean, bright, self-renewing energy is going to waste making programmes that most people will avoid because they have the word "God" in the title. God is Green (12 February) sees Dowd flying around the world asking representatives of the world's Churches why they spend all their time flying around the world and so little attempting to grapple with the problems of climate change.

Yes, there's a contradiction here, and yes, he owns up to it. Shooting this one-off documentary required 18,000 miles in an aircraft and 900 miles in an enormous American people-mover. But perhaps that's what it costs to bring the parlous situation of the environment to people's attention: and besides, the programme's makers have offset the cost by contributing to a scheme for solar power in developing countries.

Such calculations may soon have to be second nature to all of us, as indeed will the hair-shirt. At the end of the film, Dowd achieves something of a triumph when he persuades the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, to swear off all air travel for a year; challenged to match this commitment, Dowd offers to make no "personal or holiday" flights for two. Ho, hum: why is the bishop's business travel up for negotiation, when the programme-maker's is not?

Still, the game of "greener than thou" doesn't take us very far. We are all going to

have to change our ways, except, of course, for the millions in the developing countries who won't be able to change theirs, forgoing the benefits of the industrialisation we have enjoyed for a century. As one man in Mumbai put it, "I want to live comfortably. I want my air conditioning."

It's hard to see democracy fixing this mess. Politicians are in the business of promising jam tomorrow. They are not in the business of taking the jam off the table and puffing it back in the cupboard. But that, insists Dowd, with only slightly forced optimism, is where religion comes in. Faith, and faith leaders, can make people do things that they don't really want to do - because they know them to be right.

Unfortunately, the world's religions have had other things to think about. The Church of England, in fairness, is busily plastering its church roofs with solar panels. But the American evangelicals have been split between those who see every natural disaster as a step closer to the second coming and those who seem to have read the front of the Bible, and not just the back. They have begun to appreciate that God asked us to look after Creation rather than pillaging it. Now, not before time, the sane party are in the ascendant, which may well concentrate the minds of candidates for the next presidency.

Muslims, meanwhile, have a holy book that frequently reminds them of their duty to the planet, and yet there is only one tiny Islamic environmental group in the entire world: its leader's great hope is reminding the faithful that they need only make the Haj once in their lifetime, instead of every year or two. And the Hindus? They seem to be taking their cue from Doris Day: the sera, sera. "Whatever you do, you suffer," says one thinker interviewed here, in the wake of the Mumbai floods in India that killed at least 1,000 people.

Which leaves Catholics. Dowd makes a stir-ring call for an encyclical on this most pressing of topics. But for now he has to make do with an interview with a Vatican spokesman who recognises a low-energy light bulb but seems inordinately proud of the irrelevant fact that no power is generated inside Vatican City.

Just before the last commercial break, Dowd insists that despite everything, he is not down-cast. He will, he says, explain why he has not "succumbed to the sin of despair". And then he comes back and calls in a man to put solar panels on his roof. It will cost him £8,000 ... and it will generate 1 kW on a sunny day, not nearly enough to boil a kettle.

One of the saddest moments in this film is when Dowd asks his little nephew about the future. Like my own children, he can only imagine things getting worse. If he'd asked me, aged nine, I would have reeled off a lot of excitable stuff about robot pals, and hover cars, and tunnels to America.

John Morrish

#

10th February 2007 The Church needs to recognise explicitly that climate change is a moral issue

By Michael McCarthy

Given that redemption is at the heart of Christian belief, it is appropriate that the Church now has an opportunity to redeem itself for what seems to me is its most egregious error of recent decades: its failure to appreciate the true significance of climate change. Yes, there have been a few prophetic voices within the Church. There is a hint of recognition of the problem, emerging here and there, such as in the Pope's New Year message. But that a giant institution with a giant moral purpose has been almost silent on the phenomenon likely to cause more human suffering than any other in the century to come has been a great failure of leadership. There is, though, still time to make amends.

Two events in 2007 present the Vatican with an unparalleled chance to add its own weight and authority to what, it is becoming ever clearer, will be the immensely difficult struggle to combat global warming. The first is the publication of the Fourth Assessment Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The initial section of this, on the science of the problem, was released in Paris last week; the other two, on the likely impacts of climate change, and the potential policy responses to it, will be released in April and May respectively.

Last week's report represents what the international scientific community thinks will happen to the climate if we continue emitting the greenhouse gases that are changing it. It is doubly noteworthy for its assurance and for its dire predictions. In conclusions endorsed by all the world's leading governments, it asserts that the reality of climate change is "unequivocal" and that there is "a better than nine out of 10 chance" that human actions are causing it.

Using a range of supercomputer simulations of the global climate system, it predicts that continuing emissions of greenhouse gases will cause world average temperatures to rise by anything up to 6.4°C by the year 2100. This latter figure would represent a nightmare climate in which agriculture and much of human life would be impossible, but even the rises at the bottom end of the predictive scale would be entirely destabilising for human society.

The Vatican needs to take on board these findings as quickly as possible, and their consequences: that the scientific argument is over, and the world is genuinely looking at a terrifying future, a future in which the poorest of the world will suffer the most. The document's particular value is that there are no more excuses for ignorance: the Church now has something of impeccable provenance which can inform its position authoritatively.

The second opportunity follows on from this first: the climate change conference that the Vatican is proposing to hold later this year under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Academy of Science. This can go one of two ways: it can be a well-meaning talking shop, or it can be worthwhile. For it to be worthwhile, those involved must waste no time debating the science: there are a dwindling number of perverse sceptics who dispute it, but to all intents and purposes it is settled.

The Church needs to take the situation described in the IPCC report as a given, and follow through the implications. It should explicitly recognise the scale of the problem. It should recognise equally explicitly, and forcefully, that this is a moral issue, and that we need address it in our own lives as well as recognise the problems for others.

Above all, the Vatican has an opportunity that no other institution has: it can throw its own moral authority behind the efforts to reach an international political agreement on how to combat it.

Negotiation is key. The world cannot fight global warming without the cooperation of the biggest greenhouse gas emitters, most of all the US and China, both of whom are rapidly expanding their CO2 emissions. Both are distrustful of each other's motives, but only a new global covenant that includes them both, as well as all the other nations of the world, can offer any hope of halting the slide towards climate disaster. Constructing such a covenant will be fiendishly difficult, but if the Church can actively help, it would begin to make up for what has so far been a calamitous failure to understand what is at stake. #

3rd March 2007

Fishy tale

KFC STANDS for Kentucky Fried Chicken but now fish is on the menu in its American restaurants, and the fast-food giant is claiming that it has something to do with Lent. The company is offering a battered fish sandwich "for American Catholics who want to observe Lenten season traditions while still leading their busy, modern lifestyles".

Lenten observance for these fortunate Catholics comes in the form of battered Alaskan pollock and tartar sauce in a bun. It has 280 calories, 7 grammes of fat and costs a dollar. There is even an attempt to get papal approval for the marketing ploy.

"The company has turned to Pope Benedict XVI, beseeching him to bestow his papal blessing for this innovative new menu item," the company's press release oozes. "Vatican officials confirmed they received KFC's request, and the company is hopeful to get the Pope's blessing this Lenten season."

Is it because he wears the fisherman's ring?

#

March 2007

Covenant of creation

David Miliband's conversion to the reality of climate change is welcome ("Minister on a mission, 17 February). So is his recognition that wisdom and climate morality may be found in religion. Teddy Goldsmith, also of Jewish heritage, came to the same conclusion decades ago. Miliband should know, however, that with-in the Jewish and Christian tradition, the "environment" is precious not just because people suffer when they damage it. Rather the whole created, evolving earth is a community within which people are derivative and responsible members. Our fellow creatures too are precious in God's eyes, they suffer when humans abuse the climate. 'All things were created through him,' begins John's beautiful prologue. Jews and Christians know the Noah story. Weather strikes back when humans sin. We are in an eternal rainbow covenant with God, with fellow sensate creatures as our covenant partners. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change has nothing to fear in telling it as it is to us.

(Dr) Edward P. Echlin, Bexhill, East Sussex

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10th March 2007

Tablet Comments - Ethics of Global Warming

Planet Earth should in theory be capable of supporting life, including human life, for thousands of years to come - indeed, some estimates say millions. It all depends on the human race. Not long ago the greatest danger seemed to come from nuclear war between the superpowers. Now the major threat is environmental damage, particularly the heating up of the atmosphere owing to the discharge into it of so-called greenhouse gases such as methane and carbon dioxide. The prospect is not of an overnight catastrophe wiping out the human race in one sweep, but of a planet which can currently sustain a human population of six billion - and growing - finding within a generation or two that, due to global warming, the sustain-able population is only a fraction of that - and falling. The effect would be something like that of the Irish potato famine, but on a global scale and lasting for centuries. Clearly mil-lions would die in acute hardship and misery, and the poorest and most vulnerable would be the first to go.

However, there are still those who deny the reality of global warming. At the extreme end of that spectrum are those who allege that the scientific evidence has been cooked. More common is the acceptance of global warming as a natural phenomenon, caused by changes in the radiation from the sun. Both positions deny that there is any obligation on humanity to change its ways in order to head off an environmental catastrophe. A particular - and revealing - dislike is of any intervention that would interrupt the functioning of market forces (or the profitability of the oil industry).

Is one free to deny global warming if one so chooses? Is it a moral matter? To say so is not necessarily to want to go as far as the Bishop of London, Dr Richard Chartres, who faces the prospect of traveling to an international conference in Romania by train - a 37-hour journey with four changes. He famously said not long ago that air travel was a sin because of the greenhouse gases emitted in the course of it; hence the long ordeal by hard seats and railway sandwiches to which he is about to subject himself. Nor do we have to choose between the Bishop of London and Cardinal Biffi, former Arch-bishop of Bologna, who said recently that the Antichrist could well appear to the faithful as an environmental campaigner. Indeed, his fuller portrait - ecumenist, ecologist and pacifist - bore a closer resemblance to St Francis of Assisi than to the Scarlet Beast of the Apocalypse.

Whether the science stands up is a matter of scientific, not moral, judgement, provided it is made in good faith. But there comes a point where a purely scientific prediction can no longer be ignored by moralists. Invoking the precautionary principle, the Catholic Church would be well within its remit on faith and morals to say that the probability of global warming is now more than a hypothesis, and to gamble with the survivability of the planet in return for short-term material and economic gains would be gravely sinful. And that would be to say, in turn, that denial of global warming is no longer a sustainable position, but morally wrong. #

10th March 2007

How green is my parish

Christians need to regain that ancient sense of the sacredness of nature and its sacramentality

Global warming is accepted as one of the key moral issues of our time. But this is not just a question of our Church catching up with the carbon agenda. Global warming is more than an ethical issue. Behind it lie spiritual and theological realities, which our Church once clearly understood.

Lent was green. In Middle English the word "Lent" meant "spring". Early medieval society, newly Christian, faced up to the annual cycle of starvation and hunger for the poor - brought on by the "hunger gap" between depleted win-ter stores and new spring crops. The Church decreed that for Lent everyone, rich and poor alike, must fast at near subsistence level to prevent the wealthy from living sumptuously while the poor starved. However late the spring, food stocks would now have a chance of lasting and many more might survive.

Centuries earlier, Lent had been established as a final period of induction for catechumens seeking membership of the Christian community, with its very distinctive lifestyle and spirituality.

It is hard to grasp how radical a step it was during the Roman Empire to change from being pagan to Christian. Roman society was indescribably violent, brutal and oppressive; it not only made the killing of criminals and enemies into public entertainment, but

also made it an act of public worship - of human sacrifice to various of its many rival "good" and "bad" gods. Rome deified state power, accepting no accountability. A slave society, it allowed masters to kill slaves almost at whim. Rome was acquisitive, power hungry, but also divided by unimaginable disparities between rich and poor, and between citizens, subjects and slaves. Without regard to the environment, Rome turned tributary nations into grain baskets or despoiled their mineral resources, taxing them excessively to ensure subjugation and poverty, wiping them out in merciless acts of genocide should they be deemed a threat.

Against a background of such ruthlessness, those preparing for baptism were joining a non-violent community - a community that forbade attendance at circuses, military service, material acquisitiveness and self-seeking superstition and magic; a community that for-bade any association with the sexual depravity of some of the religious cults and that refused to acknowledge the divine status of the emperor. '

But this community was also a school for living differently. It sought to bridge the gap between slave and free, male and female, citizen and foreigner, rich and poor, human beings and the rest of Creation. It understood created time and reality to be wholly good and existing to serve God's saving love. As a community it was committed to the redistribution of the wealth of its members, particularly at its weekly Eucharist, so that the poor could live with dignity and rich and poor alike could more readily find the presence of their Saviour in their worship.

Drawing on its Jewish origins, the Christian community lived the Sabbath and the Jubilee (Luke 4:19); Creation was neither despised nor despoiled, but respected as sacred and husbanded with the compassionate stewardship of a "good gardener". It believed in one God, a supreme Creator, whose "glory fills all heaven and earth", and who is continually praised by every aspect of Creation - including the weather (see many Psalms, including 19 and 29, and also Daniel 3: 51-90); a God whose nature people might begin to grasp by studying the created world around them (Romans 1: 20) or by studying the many scriptural accounts of Creation (Genesis 1, 2-3; Psalm 104; Proverbs 8; Job 36-42; Isaiah).

In this community the Christian would also learn to live out what it meant that the whole Creation is a sacrament revealing God and that the Christian's practical relationship to Creation had to be akin to that of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (Matthew 6: 25-30) - a radical dependence on an all-creating and all-loving God, who continually holds all things in being. Indeed their Saviour himself, they learned, is the first-born of all Creation and all things are created through him and for him ... and he holds all things in unity (Colossians 1: 15-17; John 1).

The early Christians had a saying, "Caro cardo salutis": "Creation is the hinge of salvation" - human beings are not saved from Creation, nor in spite of Creation; they are saved by means of Creation, because Jesus Christ made himself one, not only with humanity, but also with the groaning of Creation, as it waits for the time of its full liberation (Romans 8).

This radically new vision shaped Christian life, Celtic spirituality, monastic living, saints, feasts and celebrations - Rogation Days, Ember days and harvest festivals - right through to the high Middle Ages. This sense of nature seems to have receded. The phrase "Eco-Catholicism" should be a tautology; sadly it sounds like an oxymoron. As Christians, we have lost much of our sense of the sacredness of nature, leaving us hamstrung in taking on the moral and spiritual responsibilities required by the current environmental crisis.

Our country has had its environmental prophets - Barbara Ward; E.F. Schumacher; Mary Grey; Edward and Barbara Echlin, to say nothing of the Irish Columban missionary Sean McDonagh. But have they been listened to? Being environmentally aware and making the right choices is difficult without a supporting community and without a parish committed to the same values. We all need to be part of a parish whose lifestyle and decision-making expresses a spirituality of Creation and makes our parish "a school of eco-living" - in much the same way as Quaker communities are schools of non-violence, conflict management and peacemaking.

Just think how, by working with parishes over the last 40 years, Cafod has made them schools for developing the understanding and behaviour of churchgoing Catholics in relation to world poverty. Parishes as parishes must take the "green agenda" seriously. Environmental questions should be structured into all-parish planning, decision-making and expenditure. Parishes should especially try to rediscover a proper theology and spirituality of Creation in their worship; they should work together with other Churches and agencies in trying locally to build environmentally sustainable communities, villages and towns.

Fr Paul Hypher is a retired priest of the Diocese of East Anglia.

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17th March 2007

Climate change sceptics

I read your leader article "Ethics of global warming" (10 March) after viewing Channel 4's The Great Global Warming Swindle. It was very clear from this presentation that there are eminent scientists, of all nationalities, who dispute or deny that human activity is in any way responsible. Their main argument is that extreme climate changes have happened several times, many centuries before the Industrial Revolution, and are attributable to changes in solar activity. They maintain that, contrary to popular opinion, recent global warming is the cause of the increase in greenhouse gases and not the effect.

I was once advised by my confessor that a moral obligation could never rest on a doubtful 'fact'. As long as scientific opinion is divided it would therefore seem very unwise for the Church to attempt to moralise on this issue.

J.V. Thornton, Liverpool

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17th March 2007

Short-term view

"Don't we all depend on farmers ... ?" asks Monica Evans (Letters, 3 March). Most people of this country seem oblivious of the fact that in an emergency we would need every acre of productive farmland to feed a population that is now content to have out-of-season produce flown in from afar, while some of our finest agricultural land disappears under roads and interminable development. Too many politicians have a disdain for farmers and the countryside except as a recreational environment for the urban electorate.

Is there in today's mindset a reluctance to make any commitment to a vocation, be it the religious life, marriage or to farming? Even in well-established rural communities schools invite young people to look to a wider horizon beyond the farm gate - hence the disparagement mentioned by Monica Evans.

Frank J. Hind, Barnstaple, Devon - frank.hind @ myrealbox.com

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24th March 2007

Climate Change

I am responding to J.V. Thornton (Letters, 17 March) who had been impressed by Channel 4's The Great Global Warming Swindle. That programme was a confused mixture of truth, half truth and falsehood and extremely misleading. The most distinguished scientist interviewed on the programme, Professor Karl Wunsch, is complaining formally to Ofcom that he was misled and misrepresented.

Scientists possess considerable understanding of the reasons for large climate changes in the past and recognise also that changes in the sun have played some part: However, for the changes over the last 40 years, the increase of carbon dioxide is mostly due to fossil fuel burning (the carbon isotope signature provides incontrovertible evidence of that) and most of the warming is due to the increase

of greenhouse gases. That there is little doubt about this is clear from the fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published last month and prepared by about 2,500 of the world's climate scientists. Observations from space clearly demonstrate that changes in radiation from the sun cannot have been responsible for this recent warming.

More detailed critiques of the Channel 4 programme can be found in The Guardian for 13 March (George Monbiot), The Independent for 14 March (Steve Connor) and the John Ra Initiative website, www.jri.org.uk (myself).

(Sir) John Houghton FRS - Former director general of UK Meteorological Office and co-chair of Scientific Assessment for IPCC Executive, Devon - john.houghton@jri.org.uk #

24th March 2007

Climate Change

Your leader article "Ethics of Global Warming" (10 March) highlights a major problem. The environmental movement has become synonymous with climate change; it dominates our press, our politics and, judging by the Church of England's stance, our response within faith. But the crises the earth is facing are hugely greater than climate change alone.

We are in the sixth mass extinction event the world has known; one in three amphibians and almost half of turtles and tortoises are threatened with extinction, along with one in eight birds and one in four mammals. We have lost half of the world's forests, half the grasslands and half the world's wet-lands. Our freshwater systems are under intolerable strain and the oceans are polluted with many fish stocks on the brink of collapse. None of this is to do with burning fossil fuels, but rather with our lifestyles, our sheer numbers and our greed. So if you doubt the science behind climate change, then that is fine, don't believe it.

But that doesn't allow sceptics to deny the other problems. So please, if you don't want to reduce, re-use and recycle to help restrain global warming, then do it for the sake of protecting habitats or reducing pollution or restoring the health of our rivers and seas. The actions to which we are urged for the sake of climate change would also help solve the other very pressing issues. Sceptics cannot consider themselves off the hook: we have a moral duty to live in balance with the earth, whether global warming is a reality or not.

Mary Colwell, Kingsdown, Bristol - julian-marych@b-lueyo-nder.co.uk #

31st March 2007

The stones will shout out

Christ's death opened a way to a new heaven and a new earth. He liberated not just humanity but the whole of creation, as his words on Palm Sunday indicate.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, his disciples exultantly hailed his arrival: "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens!" St Luke's Gospel tells us that some Pharisees told him to check his disciples, and Jesus replied: "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out" (Luke 19:38-40).

These words are full of meaning for a truly Christian understanding of Creation and of the salvation won by Christ. Jesus implies that the stones themselves are thrilled at his arrival, that the very earth responds to his presence. Moreover he implies that what is keeping Creation silent is the fact that human beings are voicing its praise. Were they to fall silent, the earth would not be able to contain itself any longer and would shout out in acclamation as best it could. We are reminded that "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (Psalm 24:1), and that when God saw all that he had made he found it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). We are reminded also that humanity has a special place in the ordered totality that God made and loves, a unique role and responsibility. Humanity marvels at the harmony of God's Creation (Psalm 103), and lifts its praise to God: "... sun and moon ... Bless the Lord, stars of heaven, Bless the Lord ... all rain and dew, Bless the Lord ... all you winds, O bless the Lord ..." (Daniel 3:62-90).

It is worth dwelling on these two aspects of Jesus' words, because they summarise the scriptural teaching on ecological matters and can guide our catechesis in this increasingly vital area. First of all, the Scriptures teach us to hope for "the new heavens and new earth". That is what Jesus himself "promised" (2 Peter 3:13), but it is also what Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22). The God who is recorded in the first book of the Bible as making all things "very good", pronounces in the very last book: "I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). What has unfolded in the vast drama in between has been not simply the salvation of humanity, but the salvation of Creation as a whole. The covenant that God made with Noah and his descendants after the Flood was explicitly made "and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark" (Genesis 9:10). And the new and everlasting covenant was eventually sealed in the blood of Christ, who is "the image of the unseen God and the firstborn of all Creation", in whom, through whom and for whom all things were created, the one in whom "all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15-17). It is, and always was, a cosmic covenant, and God delights in his Creation in ways we will never fully fathom.

Secondly, nevertheless, humanity has a unique role to play in the covenant, and the idea of the "image of God" points the way to that role. The one and only true image of the unseen God is Jesus, as we just heard from Paul. But this is Jesus the new Adam, finally fulfilling the place and task that humanity was already given at the very outset. Adam and Eve were made in God's image (Genesis 1:27), and moreover were given dominion over Creation: "Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). The fact that this verse, which is viewed so suspiciously by those who would blame the Judaeo-Christian tradition for fostering an exploitative attitude to Creation, immediately follows the "image of God" verse clearly shows that the dominion being conferred is meant to be a reflection of God's own rule, and therefore the very opposite of destructive and uncaring. It is a kingship, humanity is God's viceroy (cf. Psalm 8:5-6; "with glory and honour you crowned him, gave him power over the works of your hand"), and the Bible is ultra-clear about the criteria for good kingship under God. "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice." In such a reign the earth will be fruitful: "may there be abundance of grain ... may it wave on the tops of the mountains" (Psalm 72:1; 72:16).

Bad kings, like Ahab, not only led the people astray, they brought drought upon the land (1 Kings: 17). The link was already clear after the sin of Adam and Eve: "Accursed be the ground because of you" (Genesis 3:17). The Bible understands there to be a connectedness between all that God has made, with humanity in a decisive position, such that when humans sin it is not only they who suffer the consequences; the whole Creation suffers, or, as St Paul famously put it, the whole Creation groans. The connectedness is most apparent in his letter to the Romans, where he makes it plain that Creation itself retains the hope of being freed from slavery: "obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21) - so salvation is indeed cosmic - but also that what frustrates that hope is human sin. We can tell this from the fact that "For the Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (verse 19). It was the behaviour of wayward children that enslaved it, and only true children of God will give it freedom. Thus we understand the stones on Palm Sunday, all but breaking into their own song of freedom and joy as Jesus, the true Son of God, appears.

However, Creation's true joy at his coming was most fully expressed a little later that week, at the Last Supper, when Jesus took bread and wine, and instead of simply breaking, distributing, eating and drinking, first of all lifted them up, giving thanks to God, as all the Last Supper accounts tell us. Adam and Eve, in the story that is emblematic of humanity's defiance and disobedience, took and ate what God had forbidden. There was no shred of thanksgiving in their act. In complete contrast, the whole spirit of Jesus' action is one of thanksgiving, Eucharist, and thanksgiving for Creation remains at the heart of the Church's understanding of the Eucharist, though this fact is

rarely if ever heeded. "In the eucharistic sacrifice, the whole of Creation loved by God is presented to the Father by means of the death and resurrection of Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1359).

So fulfilled was Creation at the hands of Jesus that it was actually transformed in his hands, which lifted up bread and wine with thanksgiving. It was made new (cf. Jesus' own reference to the "new wine", Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25), the first fruits of the making new of all things, the new heavens and new earth, by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. How significant that in its newness it was the body and blood of Christ, the very self of him in whom, through whom and for whom all things were made. It wasn't just the disciples who had a foretaste of their own fulfilment in the heavenly banquet at that moment, which is all that we normally think of whenever we do reflect on the Eucharist as a foretaste. The Creation itself fore-tasted its fulfilment, and if we see things aright we realise that the two foretastes go together. The Creation attains its final freedom when in the hands of human beings tasting their own final freedom, all of which only happens in Christ, the true Son and image of God, who treated Creation as humanity always should have done, but from the start never did.

Surely all the miracles of Jesus arise from the same fact. The countless healings show broken minds and bodies and faulty limbs and organs taking their proper form at his touch. The very storms and seas are calmed (Matthew 8:23-27) and earth finds peace. At last, a true child of God, indeed the only Son, walks the earth (and even on the sea! Matthew 14:25-33). Little wonder the stones could barely contain themselves that first Palm Sun-day. But let us finally reiterate why they did: because human beings were voicing their praise. "Do this in memory of me," said Jesus. There is never any repetition of what he did, nor any substitution of his role. He and he alone is our priest and the priest of Creation, in whom everyone and everything is lifted up to God. But all of humanity is called to image that priesthood in its treatment of Creation with respect and thanksgiving. The whole Church is a priestly people, and that priesthood embraces Creation and should care for it and speak up for it. The ordained priesthood images Christ gathering up the praise and thanksgiving of all humanity and all Creation in his own single offering on the Cross, crowned by God in the Resurrection.

As we enter into that core mystery of our faith at the climax of the coming week, let us be aware of its true dimensions: the way is being opened to the new heavens and new earth. Let us heed not only the palms this Sunday, but also the stones.

The Rev Dr Paul McPartlan, a priest of the Archdiocese of Westminster, is Carl J. Peter Professor of Systematic Theology and Ecumenism at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC.

31st March 2007

Climate change and morality

J.V. Thornton (Letters, 17 March) questions the facts reported by 600 scientists who assessed confidently that global warming was the result of human activity. He seems to believe that such facts maybe doubtful and that we therefore have no moral obligation to act on them. Sixty years ago some thought that the threat of war could be averted, a possibility that others doubted, and therefore felt no moral obligation to act upon. Nazism was a reality that politicians like Chamberlain did not have the courage to face. Today global warming is an unpleasant reality. We and our politicians should have the moral courage to face it, and act upon it - for the sake of God's Creation, and future generations.

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31st March 2007

Responsibility for Creation

Catholic social teaching, once described as "the Church's best kept secret", should perhaps relinquish that description to the Church's recognition of God's role in Creation. "The call of Creation", a slim but excellent pamphlet published by the Bishops' Conference in 2002, is all there seems to be on the subject and we do not even have a major feast day of God the creator. Your correspondent J.V. Thornton, who has been seriously deceived by Channel 4's *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, needs assurance that the Church takes the duty of care for Creation seriously. We should not wait for every last scientist to concede human responsibility for global warming to love our neighbour as ourselves, and care for the earth on which we all depend.

Joseph C. Brown, - Bloxham, Banbury, Oxfordshire

14th April 2007

Freedom, salvation and Creation

There is much to think about in Paul McPartlan's article ("The stones will shout out" 31 March) but he raises more questions than he answers. Those stones for instance. Jesus' words about them crying out if he silenced his disciples being interpreted in terms of Creation offering its praise, can, just as easily, and I think more plausibly, be seen as an example of Jesus' use of the absurd to make a point. To quieten the disciples at that juncture would have been as impossible as making the stones cry out, so no point in trying. It is the same type of illustration as the camel through the eye of a needle.

The biggest question, however, is what "freedom" and "salvation" actually mean for Creation. What does it mean for an antelope? Does it mean no longer being hunted by lions? So are lions to become vegetarians? What does it mean for the meningitis virus that brings death to children? A virus maybe a living particle but it is as much part of Creation as the non-living stones on the road to Jerusalem. The words about the freedom and fulfilment of Creation sound wonderful. Could someone, maybe Professor McPartlan, explain what they actually mean?

The Revd) Robin E. Hutt - Pawlett, Bridgwater, Somerset - robin@robinhutt.wanadoo.co.uk

28th April 2007

Towards a morally sustainable future

In this edited extract from a speech given in Rome this week at a seminar on climate change organised by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Britain's Environment Secretary argues that there is an ethical and moral dimension to combating the effects of global warming

Climate change is not just an environmental or economic issue, it is a moral and ethical one. It is not just an issue for politicians or business-ees, it is also an issue for the world's faith communities. The common thread that underpins my speech today is a belief that it is our moral duty to protect future generations, particularly those in the poorest countries who will experience the most acute suffering, from the effects of environmental degradation.

Across the world, we are now beginning to see a shift in attitudes to climate change. But well before climate change gained the profile it currently holds, the Catholic Church was warning of its consequences. In 1990, Pope John Paul II in his address to celebrate the World Day of Peace warned us of the dangers of irreversible damage caused by the green-house effect.

"In our day, there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources ... Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone ... its various aspects demonstrate the need for

concerted efforts aimed at establishing the duties and obligations that belong to individuals, states and the international community."

Seventeen years on, the warnings are reaching a crescendo. A chorus of scientists and economists, entrepreneurs and politicians are voicing their concerns. Our challenge now is to translate the growing awareness of global warming into a sustained movement that changes the way we live, work and travel.

We need to mobilise governments, businesses and citizens across the world to act - what Pope John Paul II described as an "ecological conversion". Our call to action can be guided in part by scientific evidence, by economic analysis, by illustrating that it is in our self-interest to act. But the foundations of a new climate change coalition must be deeper. They must be grounded in morality and ethics, in a sense of solidarity with the developing world and future generations, in a belief that humankind has a duty of stewardship towards nature, and, perhaps most critical of all, in the securing of a socially just balance of responsibility between rich and poor. The Catholic Church and the world's faith communities have an opportunity to help nurture these shared values.

While we have underestimated the scale, urgency and impact of climate change, so too have we underestimated our capacity to address it. The technologies, policies and institutions exist or are emerging. The public support to sustain political change is also rising. Global warming can be addressed.

We must ensure that global emissions peak and then decline within the next 10 to 15 years, if we are to avoid warming of above 2 degrees centigrade. Above this threshold, the impact on people and nature is dangerous. Rising temperatures will see entire regions experience major declines in crop yields, up to one third in Africa, with rising numbers of people at risk from hunger. Rising temperatures will mean significant changes in water availability, with some areas seeing major water shortages, and sea-level rises threatening major world cities. Whole eco-systems from coral reefs to the rainforests face collapse and many species will face extinction. Storms, droughts, forest fires and flooding will have a major impact on human life. The poorest countries will suffer the most from the effects of climate change. The costs will fall on the countries who have done least to cause climate change, and are least able to adapt to its effects.

The wealth of evidence on the scale and impact of climate change has produced a major shift over the last 12 months. Paradoxically, the most urgent environmental challenge facing the planet has stopped being primarily an environmental issue. Climate change is not just, as Al Gore puts it, "a planetary emergency" but a humanitarian one. Climate change has also become an economic issue, a national security and foreign policy issue (triggering the possibility of unprecedented migration), and an international development issue.

But we must also recognise that climate change is an issue that raises profound moral and ethical questions. Economic or scientific analysis cannot tell us what value to place on the lives of future generations, or how far the developing world should help the poorest nations to adapt to the effects of climate change, and develop low-carbon energy. These are questions that must be guided by values, or principles, as well as facts.

The first principle is sustainability. As the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, set out two decades ago, our goal must be "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The second principle is social justice. As the Kyoto Protocol recognises, we need "common but differentiated" responsibilities - common because we are all affected by climate change and all bear a responsibility, but differentiated because richer nations who have contributed the most greenhouse gas emissions have a duty to help poorer nations through the transition to a low-carbon economy and to adapt to the effects of climate change.

The third principle is stewardship. My concern is born primarily out of a concern to avoid human suffering but we must recognise that we have a duty to protect our common resources - to act as stewards of the natural environment.

This must be the year when the international community injects new momentum into the development of an international framework that can follow the end of the first Kyoto commitment period in 2012. The truth is that without global confidence in the commitment of governments to put a price on carbon, to agree a set of long-term commitments for long-term emissions reduction, and to live up to the commitments in the 1992 Rio Convention to prevent dangerous climate change, initiatives by individual governments, businesses or citizens will not have the drive and the critical mass to arrest the growth of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

That framework must promote sustainable economic development, develop the technologies of the future, and help countries cope with climate change that is here today. Such a framework must be based on five key elements - reduction of greenhouse gases, setting up of carbon markets, technology investment and transfer, arresting deforestation, and help for the most vulnerable countries. We will not conclude an agreement in these five areas this year. But we must develop the international political consensus that can form the basis of a new set of commitments for the post 2012 period.

Alongside work to forge an international framework, every country needs domestic action. The UK has successfully broken the link between economic growth and pollution growth. Our economy as a whole has grown by over 25 per cent since 1997, but our greenhouse gas emissions have been cut by 8 per cent. We are introducing a Climate Change Bill to ensure that the UK becomes the first country in the world with a legislative framework designed to manage the transition to a low-carbon economy - it will put into law our commitment to reduce CO₂ emissions by 60 per cent by 2050, and by 26 to 32 per cent by 2020.

Our aim is to demonstrate to other countries, particularly the developing world, that we, as the world's first industrial nation, are prepared to make our contribution to reducing global emissions. The bill also aims to minimise the costs of moving to a low-carbon economy through early, but gradual, action with long-term clarity for business, rather than later, more abrupt changes. The majority of greenhouse gases produced in the UK come from three main sources: electricity, heat and transport. In each area, it is possible to see how light, warmth and mobility can be provided in a low-carbon way. In each we are adopting policies that will drive the transition.

Governments and business must show leadership. But ultimately, the world's fate will rest on the actions of citizens around the world - whether they are prepared to buy products from companies with high environmental standards, reduce the amount of energy they waste, and support governments that are prepared to put a price on pollution.

The task ahead is to forge what one could call an "environmental contract" - a shared understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizens and business in relation to the natural environment. In the same way that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was argued for a need to forge a social contract that limited some of our freedoms in return for social order, so too in the twenty-first century we need to forge an environmental contract to safeguard the environmental order. None of us has a right to pollute and compromise the welfare of future generations, particularly those in the poorest countries.

The world's political leaders have a unique responsibility in helping to forge an environmental contract. But leadership must come from all parts of society. Civil society and especially faith communities have a huge opportunity and responsibility, particularly in addressing the moral and ethical questions posed by climate change. You have a global reach and influence that governments do not. And far from being an add-on to the values and work you do, climate change is integral, particularly to the work you do on development.

In his message for World Day of Peace from 1 January 2007, the Pope said: "Humanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, and human ecology. Experience shows that disregard for the environment always harms human co-existence, and vice versa ... if development were limited to the technical-economic aspect, obscuring the

moral-religious dimension, it would not be an integral human development, but a one-sided distortion which would end up by unleashing man's destructive capacities."

Let me finish with an observation by the [environmental pressure group] WWF. It has calculated that if everyone in the world were to consume natural resources and generate carbon dioxide at the rate we do in the UK, we would need three planets to support us. We are depleting our natural resources at a far faster rate than we are replenishing them. The challenge is to move towards a one-planet economy and one-planet living - where there is a balance between what we give and what we take. I am optimistic that we can meet that challenge, but we can do so only by appealing to a combination of moral duty and self-interest, by engaging a coalition of the world's faith communities, by developing an ethic of environmental stewardship. It is an endeavour around which I hope the world can unite, an endeavour that I believe we must work on together.

The Rt Hon David Miliband MP is **Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.** #

28th April 2007 **Climate change a moral problem, says Miliband**

DAVID MILIBAND has urged the Vatican to exploit its international influence to change the way the world responds to global warming, declaring that the Church holds more sway than governments. The Environment Secretary was due to address a climate change conference at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace on Thursday, telling his audience that they have a moral duty to protect future generations.

"Climate change is not just an environmental or economic issue, it is a moral and ethical one," Mr Miliband was to say. "It is not just an issue for politicians or business, it is an issue for the world's faith communities."

The conference, also attended by Archbishop Patrick Kelly of Liverpool and the Anglican Bishop James Jones of Liverpool, was opened by the president of the council, Cardinal Renato Martino.

"Civil society and especially faith communities have a huge opportunity and responsibility, particularly in addressing the moral and ethical questions posed by climate change," Mr Miliband planned to tell the conference. "You have a global reach and influence that governments do not. And far from being an add-on to the values and work you do, climate change is integral, particularly to the work you do on development." #

28th April 2007 **Book Review - Scorched Earth - Six Degrees: our future on a hotter planet**

It's both fashionable and urgent to become climate change literate. So any book that promotes education and behavioural change should be grabbed by both hands. Mark Lynas spent several months in Oxford's Radcliffe Science Library poring over thousands of scientific journals normally consulted only by a handful of specialists. He's done us a great service. The result is that the often impenetrable becomes widely understandable.

Using a simple but effective idea, he charts the future state of the world for each of the six degrees the temperature may rise this century according to the range predicted by this year's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. Even a six-degree change may not seem a big deal when the temperature usually drops by more than that during the night. Lynas is not alone in quoting the "killer statistic": during the last ice age 18,000 years ago, average global temperatures were only about six degrees colder than today.

So in a one-degree world, what's likely to happen? Mount Kilimanjaro loses its ice cap, the coral of the Great Barrier Reef is irreparably damaged, the plains of the western United States are devastated by drought, and the permafrost shifts ever northwards. In a two-degree world, the southern Mediterranean is far more prone to forest fires, polar bears make their last stand, and India's wheat and rice production suffers significant reduction.

And so it goes on. Anything less than a two-degree rise is widely regarded as far-reaching but containable. Three degrees and beyond hardly bears thinking about. Six degrees and the planet is a lonely one. Lynas relies on climate change models to predict the future, but also travels back millions of years to when the planet was at markedly different temperatures.

So does he use the science responsibly? One of the problems with climate change models is that they often come up with different scenarios. Lynas understandably draws heavily on the Hadley Centre model, best known for predicting the virtual collapse of the Amazon forest sometime this century with devastating consequences for the world's climate.

However, one of the main brains behind the Hadley Centre model, Professor Peter Cox, admits that although all models predict rising temperatures, some of them suggest greater precipitation in parts of the Amazon. He says that if you take all the models into account, then maybe a 10 to 40 per cent probability of severe impact on the Amazon is more defensible. These other models are not fully discussed by Lynas.

The same caveat can be levelled at his discussion of the glaciers melting in Peru. He describes a potential nightmare scenario of millions pouring out of the capital, Lima, back to mountain villages. Yet as he says, we don't know how much Lima depends on glacial melt for its water supplies.

Some campaigners argue that "cherry-picking" scientific results is justified given the severity of the threat. But it can be counter-productive. Alarmism can lead to fatalism and disempowerment when faced with such catastrophic scenarios. To be fair, Lynas is at pains to stress that he is optimistic there is still time to take action - about eight years by his reckoning. As he says, you don't just sit back in depression and watch a fire in your kitchen take hold and spread to the rest of your house.

Talking of fires, even if there was only a 10 per cent chance of the Amazon rainforest dying, we should act. It's called a "low probability, high impact" event. An aeroplane crash is another example: after all, few people would get on a plane knowing there is a 10 per cent chance of it crashing.

James Painter #

5th May 2007 **Victims of climate change**

David Miliband ("Towards a morally sustainable future", 28 April) is not a firm believer in human connectedness with the whole earth community. I do not condone Al Gore's not "walking the talk" in his inconvenient empyreal fuel bills and, even worse, his climate dam-aging unnecessary air travel. Yet Gore's message remains true. Climate change is "a planetary emergency", as well as a "humanitarian, economic, national security, foreign policy, migrations and international development issue", as Miliband contends. Miliband could look more deeply into Genesis and more widely into the whole Judaeo-Christian tradition. All earth creatures are precious to our Creator; "all things" are included in our redemption. All suffer when people damage the climate. Miliband does not seem to feel it matters much that other creatures suffer with us. It matters a lot to sister wren, brother bee, cousin tree and mother earth.

As Chief Seattle's speech-writer famously said, "All things are connected."

(Dr) **Edward P. Echlin** - *Bexhill, East Sussex* #

The Universe

7th January 2007

Suspicion over radio vote on hunting ban

By Sean Price

TWO prominent Catholics questioned the legitimacy of a poll on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme which suggested that listeners had voted overwhelmingly for the repeal of the 2004 act which banned the hunting of foxes with dogs.

Questions were raised over the 52.8 per cent vote for the repeal of the Hunting Act after the Countryside Alliance confirmed that it had conducted a drive to encourage pro-hunting activists to vote.

It emerged that the panel which had selected five Acts to be included in *Todays* end-of-year poll considered excluding the hunting ban even though it received more nominations than any other law, because of evidence of a concerted campaign to skew the result.

The Hunting Act took more than half of the votes in the Christmas Repeal poll, well ahead of the European Communities Act of 1972 which took Britain into the Common Market, with 29.7 per cent.

Evidence

However, Catholic presenter Ed Stourton said there were "suspicions that there was an organised campaign at work".

And Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe, an opponent of hunting and member of the panel which assessed nominations for the poll, added: "Undeniably, the Countryside Alliance pulled out every last stop to get this result.

"We did hesitate on the panel to put this one forward because there was already evidence of links from the Countryside Alliance — encouragement etc — and of course we had the Boxing Day meets, when just about everybody who actively supports hunting would have been out and could have been reminded."

An appeal had been posted on the Country-side Alliance website urging people to vote in the poll, along with a link to the Today site to make it easier for them to take part.

In contrast to the popularity of the vote on banning hunting foxes with dogs, just 3.6 per cent of respondents voted to overturn the 1701 Act of Settlement which bars Catholics from taking the throne. #

14th January 2007

British most to blame for global warming

By Paul Donovan

A NEW 'climate calendar' shows that just 10 days into the new year the average British citizen will have produced as much carbon dioxide as his or her African counterpart will in a whole year.

The World Development Movement calendar shows African countries reaching British levels by January 10, India reaching the levels by February 9 and Latin American countries reaching them by March 6. Catholic environmental specialist Ellen Teague said the climate calendar was a good way of allocating responsibility for global warming.

"The climate calendar is an effective tool for indicating just how much the British population contributes to destructive climate change, compared to peoples in the world's poorest countries," said Mrs Teague. "It shows how important it is to make both serious lifestyle changes and political choices aimed at reducing car carbon footprint, if we truly wish to assist poor communities internationally. "This is just as important as giving money to charities for development projects."

Benedict Southworth the director of the World Development Movement, said: "The poorest countries in the world, with 738 million people, make effectively no contribution to climate change, but it is those same people who Face the worst consequences. He continued: "160,000 people are already dying every year due to climate change related diseases and billions will face drought, floods, starvation and disease."

Mr Southworth went on to criticise Chancellor Gordon Brown and Tony Blair for presenting themselves "as leaders of the fight against global poverty while failing to tackle the single biggest threat to the world's poor - climate change.

Emissions

"The truth is that UK emissions have under Labour by six per cent," he added. Environmental campaigners are call for the government to include legally binding annual targets to reduce carbon emissions in its new Climate Change Bill.

They also want the government to holt the planned growth in aviation which will otherwise make it impossible to meet the government's long term targets for cutting greenhouse gas emmissions. #

21 January 2007

Are we paying a moral price for our abundance of food

THE RISING rates of obesity have put food at the top of the nation's health agenda, but it is the ethical issues related to food production which are increasingly concerning consumers, and leading many of them to reconsider how they spend their cash. Historically, the problem with food was simply getting enough of it – meat was a rare treat for the poor, droughts or over-tong winters brought famine, and all but the very rich ate seasonal food which was locally grown.

But in the First World, quantity is no longer an issue. A wide range of produce from all over the world is freely available at every supermarket in the land. But does this abundance come at an unacceptable moral cost? Well increasingly the answer seems to be 'yes' and many consumers are now beginning to look hard at the ethical implications of their choices.

Vegetarianism, which is linked to lower rates of heart disease and obesity, has never been more popular: but even those reluctant to give up eating meat are turning away from production methods they regard as inhumane, eschewing veal and battery-farmed chickens in favour of organic meat which hasn't been pumped full of growth hormone.

Increasingly centralised abattoirs and meat processing plants have promoted a huge growth in the numbers of animals being hauled round the UK, and in live exports abroad, but it isn't only animal welfare issues which concern consumers – alarm at the impact which all food production methods have on the natural environment has led many to question whether it is really necessary to fly peaches half way around the world in winter.

Emissions

Ninety-five per cent of the fruit sold in the UK is imported, and half the vegetables, and the last decade has seen a doubling in the quantity of food carried as air freight, which has a far greater impact on the environment than either road or sea transport.

Agriculture and food also account for nearly 30 per cent of goods transported on UK roads, adding to the carbon dioxide emissions which contribute to climate change – largely thanks to supermarkets which frequently transport goods to central locations for packaging, before taking them back for sale to where they were produced in the first place. Competition from the supermarkets has also seen the closure of many local shops, so more of us travel further to buy goods which were once available close to home: the average UK adult now clocks up 135 car miles a year simply shopping for food.

So what can the careful consumer do? 'Produced in Kent', an organisation which champions the county's food producers, has just run a highly successful Christmas campaign which urged shoppers to 'Give the Planet a Present' by buying locally produced meat and vegetables to reduce the environmental impact of 'food miles'. While 'Sustain', a nationwide alliance for better food and farming, is piloting projects across the UK to get fresh, locally produced food into schools, hospitals and shops. But sometimes weighing up the impact of food production isn't as simple as measuring how far it has travelled. According to a recent Defra report it is less damaging to import tomatoes from Spain than to grow them in heated glass houses in Britain. But if it's better for the environment not to eat out-of-season tomatoes at all, how many of us would give up the nation's favourite salad ingredient?

In America, worries about the use of cloned animals and genetically modified crops in food production have led the National Catholic Rural Life Conference to publish a 'Bill of Rights' which would allow people to make informed and ethical choices about the food they buy. The organisation which combines the Church, with care of the community and care of creation, defined these as the universal right to sufficient quantities of safe and nutritious food, and to know where foodstuffs come from and whether they have been genetically modified.

Consequences

They are also demanding the right for people to be certain their food has been produced without harm to the environment and under socially-just conditions which have not exploited farmhands, animals or packing plant employees.

Finally, the NCRLC wants packaging to indicate how many 'food miles' have gone into product ingredients so that people can choose to buy locally-sourced items. Eating is a moral act, says the NCRLC, and Catholics should strive to change eating habits which have unintended moral consequences, whether that is by choosing 'dolphin friendly' tuna or crops grown in a sustainable system which does not exploit the environment or farm workers. It's not easy being ethical, particularly when the long term implications of using genetically modified crops, for example, are unknown: but research into the use of farm chemicals has already shown it has a significant detrimental impact on the health of poor migrant workers.

And if people act together to make moral choices they do have the power to influence the means of production says the NCRLC. Their stand has been backed by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops whose recent pastoral letter. Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice, urged all Catholics to think carefully about the products they buy and the companies behind them. "When we purchase goods and services, we can choose to support companies that defend human life, treat workers fairly, protect creation, and respect other basic moral values at home and abroad."

So what can the average consumer do to make sure their choices are ethical? Lord Bach, the UK Minister for sustainable farming and food, suggests walking to shops and buying products with as little packaging as possible. With the average UK household disposing of more than three kilos of food a week and 14 kilos of packaging, the concept of 'food miles' also applies to waste which has to be transported to landfill sites.

Buying seasonal produce helps. reduce the need for artificial heating in greenhouses; locally sourced organic food reduces the need for the fossil fuels used to manufacture and transport the chemicals applied in mainstream agriculture, and buying Fair Trade products helps to ensure that Third World Farmers get a just return for their labour. #

21st January 2007

Comment - Fr Shay Cullen

HARDLY a day passes without some new dire warning of the disastrous impact of man made global warming. Climate change is upon us as we witness huge ice shelves of the Arctic and Antarctica breaking up. Rare species are threatened with extinction and low lying coastlines around the world will soon be flooded. Campaigns to save the environment are growing. In Subic Bay fisher folk are trying to close illegal fish pens that are polluting the waters, damaging the corals and the beaches and disrupting the livelihood of hundreds. Speaking out for justice is more important than ever as fish and animals are threatened worldwide.

Polar Bears are on the list of endangered species, with hundreds more species are becoming extinct and climate change and environmental damage is causing it. The scientific evidence that we humans are heating up the planet by the non-stop burning of fossil fuels is undeniable. Heavy industries pollute the environment with smoke and belching gases that create a seal around the planet that prevents the escape of heat. We have turned the planet into a greenhouse, temperatures continue to rise causing heat waves, forest fires, droughts, violent storms, rising sea levels, freezing winters blistering summers, flash floods and melting ice caps. We are facing a catastrophe.

Political will, a change in our lifestyle and a change in corporate behaviour is necessary to reverse this process. Oil corporations that drill and spill must be held accountable, mining companies that dig and damage have to be challenged to change their wasteful ways. All of us have to adopt new habits and conserve energy and power. Turning off unused electronic equipment can save millions of gallons of fuel. We can drive less, walk more, recycle and reuse, go organic and buy fair traded goods. We can make a more just, cleaner, protected environment if we have the moral and political will to do so. We can reduce asthma and lung disease, toxic poisoning, food contamination and water pollution by caring more about people than profit. Global warming is driven more by greed than need.

This week Filipinos began campaigning against a proposed 300-megawatt coal-fired power plant to be built on the beautiful and scenic Redondo Peninsula on Subic Bay. Coal burning power plants are the most polluting and damaging of all. There is already a surplus of power generation in the Subic Bay area. There is an Enron power plant in Subic already. In 1996 a new power line from the national grid provided even more power. A congressional hearing found evidence of corruption. The line was unnecessary, over designed and overpriced. It was still erected, and a corrupt nobody got elected to high office. Industry helps elect it own. The proposed plant is just more of the same, a trade of electrical for political power. Electricity and gas prices have greatly increased, causing poverty, and an increase in forest destruction. The poor use more charcoal for cooking now and more trees are lost. After 60 years of indiscriminate logging by the rich almost 70 per cent of the Philippines forests, the lungs of the earth, are gone.

Toxic fumes from the burning charcoal in the shacks of the poor cause them extensive lung damage and asthma. By providing low cost smokeless charcoal made from waste coconut husks we are trying to provide an alternative and we plant 1000 trees a year. Change is possible on a small and large scale if we act together for the common good. In Zambales, a Philippine indigenous group o'Aeta protested the start of an open pit mine and he stopped. But their leader was later assassinated by a death squad.

In the Amazon rain forest, 800 Achuar, an indigenous people, led by their chief Alfonso Hualinga Sandy and his wife Ana, banded together and surrounded the Peruvian oil drilling complex of Plus-petrol in a peaceful protest a few months ago.

They demanded an end to 36 years of oil spills and environmental destruction. Waving their ceremonial spears they closed the roads, airport and river port and halted production for two weeks. Corporate earnings plunged, government revenue stopped and suddenly these forgotten throw away people were in the headlines and getting total government attention. Soon most of their demands were met, it was an unexpected but resounding success.

So peaceful protesters take heart; people power can save the environment, speaking out does work, we just have to do more of it to save the planet and ourselves. #

18th February 2007

It's cool to think ethically as the earth keeps warming up

By John Battle

ANY search for a clean, 'pure' source of everyday energy is misguided. We all now know that carbon fuel sources – coal, gas, oil – all cause great problems of atmospheric pollution.

Burning waste to generate energy in combined heat and power schemes is tainted by the same toxic emission problems, and though the new generation of nuclear energy power stations produce no noxious carbon dioxide, there is still a real unresolved problem of what to do with the residual radioactive waste that can remain for up to 10,000 years. Solar energy cells are still costly to produce, and there are local people opposed to wind and wave power installations spoiling their environment, or their view.

I recall, as energy minister, visiting a proposed wind farm site only to be told that the turbine generators would be too noisy (not true), that birds would be caught up in the blades (unlikely), or that, more unusually: "Even wind energy is tainted by original sin!" There can be no clean energy way out of our increasingly polluted planet.

Nevertheless, the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change spells out their deepening conviction, based partly on the evidence of core samples in the ice caps, that the biggest influence on climate change is the increasing level of greenhouse gases released by mankind, largely through burning fossil fuels in planes, cars, power stations and industrial processes.

The panel, made up of an international group of top research scientists, monitors the global situation and reports regularly. It is advising that human behaviour is fundamentally polluting the planet beyond the point of continued sustainability. Of course, like all sciences, their propositions are contested.

Last week a Danish climatologist claimed that in fact cosmic rays failing to reach the earth had a greater impact on global warming than human influenced pollution. Dr Henrik Svensmark's research was published in the reputable Proceedings of the Royal Society. He claimed cosmic rays radiate from the stars, bombarding the earth and creating electrically charged ions in the atmosphere. These act as magnets for water vapour and enable cloud formation. But he argued that the rays are not getting through to us because increased activity on the surface of the sun is deflecting them away from the earth. Less cloud cover inevitably means increased global warming.

Other climatologists have argued for years that our planet's temperature and atmospheric thickness are dependent on the sun's activity and flashes of energy 'sunspots' would have a much greater impact on our changing climate patterns than a thousand new coal-burning power stations in China.

But while we may not be in a position to discern and assess the detailed scientific arguments about causes, perhaps we have to try and do something about our inheritance – "original sin" – by considering that we may be part of the problem and therefore ought to change our behaviour, individually and collectively.

It's not just that environmental concerns have suddenly shot up the agenda nationally and internationally in recent months. It's the terms of responsibility in which they are now debated which is significant. There is a Kenyan proverb which goes: "We do not inherit the earth from our forefathers, we have it on loan from our children." The need to tackle environmental degradation is seen now in terms of the ethics of responsibility to the next generation.

We are under a moral obligation not to leave a worse world to our children. The ethical focus may not be on the 'ultimate ends' of the next life, but is certainly on ensuring that our children and our children's children are not left in real difficulties of survival after we are gone. The climate change agenda, in other words, has acted as a catalyst for new ethical thinking, rooted in transgenerational responsibility. It's a good start and taps the deep need to make the world a better place.

Recently one newspaper commentator, declaring himself "a Catholic and recently converted environmentalist", complained that the main religions had nothing to say on environmental sustainability. He couldn't be more ill-informed. Christian theology of creation, not least in its newly-rediscovered 'Celtic' experience, is deeply environmentally conscious. Jewish and Muslim theologians also have a strong emphasis on caring for the earth, as do the integrationist religions of Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. Respect for creation is a central theme that most religions have in common. It's certainly there, if sometimes underplayed.

As we approach Lent, the Church provides an annual space to reflect and reconnect. Drawing together the agendas of environmental responsibility, tackling poverty, and inequality is the current political challenge to ensure that protecting the environment and supporting the poor, are not treated as mutually incompatible, or played off against each other: "trees versus indigenous people", as one recent headline put it. It's time for the faith traditions to join in and share their insights on caring for creation.

In the meantime, a campaign with a renewed sense of ethical responsibility that opens up opportunities for political, personal and practical action should be welcomed by the Church – indeed it should be leading it. 'CAFOD's Live Simply campaign is not limited to a modest, personal Lenten fast; it is already resonating more widely in a society hungry for a new sense of ethical responsibility and practical action of witnessing to developing a more sustainable world. Embedding that ethics of responsibility, widening it out to tackle injustice and inequality, and conflict and war, is already part of the developing international vision of young people. It could also help to re-energise the church.

#

25th February 2007

Push environment issue in parishes

IT IS now ten years since lengthy protests against the Newbury Bypass began. When eventually opened in 1998, the road had destroyed several sites of scientific interest, also the protected habitats of bats, badgers, dormice and certain rare snails. The nearby Elmore Abbey lost its birdlife, deer and rabbits and few have since returned.

Llantarnam Abbey similarly suffered when the Sisters failed to pre-vent an intrusive road slicing through their secluded grounds. The proposed route had been compulsorily purchased after the Welsh Office had authorised the building of the unpopular road. Despite public concern about traffic growth and the consequent rises in carbon emissions, the Government continues to promote new roads as the way forward. Where these are refused, it simply marches ahead with schemes for road widening, or rather "country-narrowing", for legally these do not require public enquiries.

The road planners have also shown blatant disregard for the sanctity of burial grounds, pushing bypasses through them despite public opposition. One source says that the Department of Transport now has the power to exhume bodies if these get in the way of a road-building scheme, although this has always been denied.

The Christian churches ought to provide annual services of penitence for the environmental destruction and deaths caused by these highways and the motorised vehicles that use them. Their unbridled use has sabotaged the environment, altered landscapes and created much noise, pollution and other health hazards. The road building and motoring industries have not begun to acknowledge or to alleviate the destruction for which they are responsible. Now that we are hearing more and more about climate change, the churches should be exploring these issues and their impacts, in some cases literally, upon their parishioners.

Anthony Porter, London

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25th February 2007**Comment - Fr Shay Cullen**

RAGING forest and bush fires hit Australia, killer droughts ravage Africa, massive floods swamp Indonesia, more typhoons than ever rip through the Philippines, the most destructive tornado in decades cut a swathe of death and destruction across Florida, heat waves kill thousands and it's getting worse. One thing is clear: potentially catastrophic climate change is upon us. The scientists have proven it and the climatologists have confirmed it; the industrialists and politicians have denied it.

But they no longer can; the UN scientific meeting of hundreds of planetary experts in Paris last week agreed that the cause is not nature but the human species. That's us, the creatures with intelligence and the brains. We are changing our planet for the worse and soon if this goes on it will be irreversible. The ice caps are melting at a prodigious rate, the sea levels are rising, the polar caps are melting and the sun's rays are not being reflected back into space but are absorbed by the oceans. Fish, birds, polar bears, thousands of species are threatened by the warming of the earth.

That heat cannot escape into space because of ever thickening layers of gases, mostly carbon dioxide, in the atmosphere. These form an impenetrable seal and are trapped and so are we. The vast forests could have absorbed much of the carbon dioxide but most have been cut down. In 1900 the Philippines had 90 per cent forest cover, today it has only 19 per cent. Every minute a chunk of the Amazon rain forest, the size of a football field, is cut down. The rich industrial nations that refuse to cut gas emissions are responsible for most of the global warming.

Africa, a vast continent, produces only 23 per cent of the greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. But the western economies, and increasingly Asia are the villains. China and the Philippines pollute the atmosphere with non-stop coal burning power stations. Most of them are violating environmental laws by operating without pollution filters and scrubbers. They simply bribe the inspectors to look the other way. All their promises to produce clean energy have never been full filled. In the Masinloc, Zambales coal plant, the fly ash is left to be blown by the wind for kilometres into communities and mango orchards, killing the harvests and causing childhood asthma and respiratory disease.

The earth's surface temperature is increasing, climate change will soon be irreversible and the crises will become worse. Greater storms and rising sea levels will wipe out coastal communities first, as happened to New Orleans, only worse. Low lying coastal properties are dropping in value already. The UN Paris report warns of a doomsday scenario if the industrialised world does not change its polluting and destructive ways immediately. That point of no return is coming closer and when it does, the deserts will quickly expand and water sources will dry up. There will be food shortages, starvation and new diseases. The warmer climate will allow killer insects to invade areas previously closed to them and tropical parasites will thrive. There is no way known to science to dissipate the greenhouse gasses that fill the upper atmosphere. There is no way to cool the planet once it heats up, as it doing year by year.

Only strong, outspoken public opinion and environmental protection campaigns are needed to persuade governments in the developing nations China and India to legislate strict industrial emission controls. They must change from fossil fuel driven economies to clean energy such as solar, wind and wave power ! generation and cut vehicle pollution. They need to encourage the use of heat pumps which use natural earth heat to warm or cool homes and buildings. They have to stop the cutting of forests and plant billions of trees before the watersheds and rivers dry up. Indus-, try needs legislation and incentives to reuse heat from one activity to fuel another. Japanese industry has cut energy use by 70 per cent by recycling heat.

We all must do our share. We can plant more trees, conserve water, insulate our homes and spend on the heat pump system. We must demand more fuel efficient vehicles, completely turn off electrical appliances when not in use, and recycle all waste. And me? I am off to help plant more than a 1,000 trees a year. #

25th February 2007 The Universe Comment - Live simply and bring an end to global warming

THE debate so far over how to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and stop global warming has taken place largely in a rhetorical vacuum. It has been encouraging that at last this crucial issue is now a matter of public debate, but frustrating that so little seems to be happening in practical terms to address the problem. The enormity of the challenge cannot be underestimated. Remember, the national government of the world's biggest environmental destroyer, namely the United States, refuses to even admit that global warming exists, let alone that serious action needs to be taken.

The publication of a report from Christian Aid highlighting how the UK government is understating the contribution of this country to global warming provides a timely reminder of our own complicity. The essence of the whole environmental crisis is the need for unprecedented international action. The approach so far has at best been piecemeal and at worst denial, with partial acceptance of the problem by the UK and other European governments, but complete denial of the problem by the US government.

So while it is good news that there is a wider recognition of the nature of the threat of global warming, the inertia on action needs to be tackled.

There seems to be a universal belief that a reduction in car and plane travel, the recycling of newspapers and a blind belief in the ability of science to come up with a solution, will suffice. The reality is that the threat posed by global warming can be dealt with by the adoption of the principles of the Church's 'Live Simply' campaign, with everyone living a more sustainable lifestyle. News of petitions and protests against road charging and congestion charges suggests that people have not got that message and remain in denial.

We will leave a terrible legacy for those who will inhabit the planet after we are gone, if real efforts are not made to address this issue. As Christians we have a responsibility to care for the earth as its stewards. We can all lead the way by living more simply and pressuring government to act to save the planet. #

4th March 2007**Tackling the greatest threat that humanity faces today**

CLIMATE change is one of the most serious ethical issues facing humanity in the 21st century. The facts speak for themselves.

China's glaciers are diminishing each year. If they disappear, where will the 250 million people who depend on their melt-waters get water during the dry season? The water supplies for the cities of Lima in Peru and Santiago in Chile also depend on melt waters from glaciers in the Andes. Australia is now in the midst of a 1000-year drought which is, most probably, due to global warming. Will there be enough water to support the population of Perth or Sydney?

A rise of one metre in the sea level would make it impossible for over 30 million Bangladeshis to live in the delta area. A significant rise in sea-levels will inundate many of the cities of the world and create a torrent of environmental refugees. No wonder the chief scientist to the British Government, Sir David King, believes that climate change is a greater threat to humanity and the earth than terrorism.

Another scientist, Sir John Haughton, believes that it is a weapon of mass destruction. Many economists are now saying we must take urgent measures to stabilise the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which is one of the main causes of global warming. Sir Nicholas Stern, a former chief economist with the World Bank, has stated that global warming is the greatest failure ever of market economics.

According to him, if we tackle it now, by lessening our dependence on fossil fuel, it will only cost about one per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP). If we leave it for another 10 or 15 years it could cost in the region of five per cent to 20 per cent. Behind these figures lies not just the death of possibly hundreds of millions of people, but the fact that the earth will be a less hospitable place to live for each succeeding generation of humans. Beyond the realm of science and economics, climate change is above all a moral issue. As missionaries, the Columban commitment to ecological justice springs from an ethical and religious basis — the gospel of Jesus. We are not scientists, though we try to use the best scientific information available when we discuss ecological issues as diverse as genetic engineering, patenting living organisms, nuclear power and now, climate change.

I was an observer at the UN Climate Change conference at Nairobi in November 2006. I noticed that almost all the negotiations around climate change quoted scientific, political and economic data but seldom mentioned the core ethical values involved in any human activity, particularly a destructive one like emitting greenhouse gases. This is a shame, because many profound ethical questions can be obscured by scientific and economic arguments about various climate change proposals. Unless ethical arguments are addressed individual nations will continue to seek their short-term economic gain no matter how this affects the global common good, especially poorer countries.

Principles

One of the first ethical principles is identifying those who are responsible for the damages caused by climate change. This principle states that a nation cannot use the excuse of minimising the cost to its own economy as an ethically acceptable excuse for failing to take actions on greenhouse gas emissions which affect the whole planet. This is the reason the Bush administration in the US, and the Howard government in Australia, give for not signing up to the Kyoto Protocol, even though they are two of the chief polluters on the earth. If we reduce the issue to manageable proportions, the moral implications of climate change become more evident. For example, if I persisted in pouring a substance into another person's house which made it impossible for them to live there, I am sure that reasonable people would come to a number of conclusions very quickly.

Firstly, that what I was doing was morally wrong. Secondly, my excuse that it was necessary for my economic growth would be dismissed. Thirdly, that I should stop polluting. Fourthly, that I should pay compensation for the harm I had done. Rich countries, which are mainly responsible for releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere over the past 200 years, are obliged to pay compensation for climate change damages that are unavoidable. In a spirit of global solidarity they are also morally bound to make resources and new technologies available to poor communities so that these countries can adapt and enjoy a decent standard of living without adopting the polluting Western model of development. When it comes to allocating global emissions among nations, the 'polluter pays' principle is consistent with the demands of distributive justice. This means that there is an ethical imperative on every nation to try to promote sustainable development policies.

Faced with the disruption which climate change will bring, everyone, but especially industrialised countries, must assume their responsibility by cutting their carbon emissions. Some countries have used the excuse of scientific uncertainty with regard to climate change to avoid cutting their greenhouse gas emissions. Petrochemical corporations, especially, Exxon-Mobile, have played a very negative role in trying to pretend that climate change is not due to burning fossil fuel. Last September, the Royal Society challenged Exxon to stop funding groups that attempt to undermine the scientific consensus on climate change.

When there is a possibility that activity, in this case burning fossil fuel, will cause great harm then the precautionary principle dictates that nations take precautions not to harm other nations. At this point in time scientific uncertainty around global warming is now minimal. On a theological level, as Christians we are called to care for God's creation. Climate change is upsetting the natural cycles upon which God's creation — animal, plants and humans — depends. Sometimes we forget that humans depend on the natural world for almost everything. In the Magnificat, Mary tells us that God's mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him (Lk. 1:50).

Each generation is called to hand on to the next generation a world as fruitful and as beautiful as the one they inherit from their parents and grandparents. Unfortunately, the full impact of climate change will take decades and maybe centuries to become fully apparent. Future generations will not thank us for making their world a less hospitable place for each succeeding generation to live in. It has never been more urgent for the Catholic Church, in its diocesan structures, religious communities and development agencies in Britain and Ireland, to give the lead in educating people about climate change and what actions must be taken to avoid it.

Stonewall: The US government has failed to acknowledge the moral and ethical implications of climate change, despite being responsible for the highest output of toxic emissions of any nation in the world

25th March 2007

Climate change big threat to the poor

HAVING seen the recent programme *God is Green*, I was extremely concerned at the apparent lack of interest in environmental matters which the major religions show — with the exception, as detailed in the programme, of some American evangelists who have been galvanised into action by a fellow Christian evangelist who also happens to be on the Intergovernmental panel for Climate Change.

I was therefore very pleased to see John Battle's recent comment in *The Universe*, but felt it could have done with a little more research and that it did not go far enough in encouraging Church members to examine their lives. Green energy is certainly a viable option and one which anyone trying to live ethically should be looking into.

Also, the most recent IPCC report is conclusive as far as proving the causes of climate change and that it is already under way. Forget sunspots or cosmic rays, the greenhouse effect has been identified as a reality for 100 years and the recent global temperature rises cannot be explained by natural fluctuations in climate. We need to change the way we live in order to save this planet from death. Organisations such as Cafod and Christian Aid (which at last have a very active anti-climate change campaign in place) recognise the churches' need to practice what it preaches by getting involved in relieving poverty and ignorance.

Climate change is the biggest threat to the poor of the planet right now, and has already claimed many victims through drought, flood and hurricane.

The Stern report from the World Bank confirms that the economic costs (which are all governments are interested in) of ignoring the problem far outweigh the costs of finally sorting out our pollution issues.

The role of churches and all other leaders in society is to use their voice and influence to get people to work on this, the biggest challenge the world has ever had to face.

A vaguely woolly suggestion that we think about sustainability around Lent-time is not enough. How about, for Lent, every Catholic who's sincere gets onto the Climate Outreach Information Network website, www.coinet.org.uk to work out their personal CO2 emissions or 'carbon footprint' and pledge to reduce it for Lent and beyond.

If your 4X4 car or your annual foreign holiday or your carelessness in switching off lights and appliances is preventing you from meeting the target CO2 emissions limit, give up some of these things for Lent and find out in the process how to live without these status symbols, lazy habits and luxuries which are killing poorer people.

Margaret Devlin - Gloucestershire

#

15th April 2007**Comment - Fr Shay Cullen**

ANYONE who has cooked a dinner or baked a cake knows that the slightest increase in oven temperature can spell ruin. That's exactly what is happening to our planet. The wasteful wicked ways of the present generation are causing climate warming, and irreversible environmental ruin. We are the world's worst cooks. All-of-us have to change our habits and, above all, governments. have to take the lead and stop the production and release of more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. World Earth Day is here again and we have done little to stop the over-cooking of earth. The sun's rays have shone on the earth since the formation of the solar system; they stimulate life and are reflected back into space by the ice at the poles.

Two hundred years of pumping industrial fumes and carbon dioxide into the sky has formed a seal between earth and space. The sun's heat comes in but can't escape, as if the earth were enclosed in a greenhouse, consequently temperatures everywhere are rising. The ice caps are melting away and instead of reflecting the sun's rays back into space the oceans absorb them.

The report on the state of the world's climate presented to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) presented in Brussels on Good Friday is so shocking that we ought to be deeply concerned. It is based on the work of 2,500 scientists backed up with powerful computer projections. The report says the poorest in the developing world will be the first to suffer and die in greater number than ever before from the effects of global warming. Those effects include rising sea levels, less water, more destructive storms, floods, heat-waves, insect infestation and less food production.

The highly industrialised economies bear the most responsibility for global warming. Most carbon dioxide emissions come from power stations and factories and oil refineries that are concentrated on the western and eastern seaboard of the United States, in north-western and eastern Europe, China, India and Japan. They produce 60 per cent of the carbon dioxide that causes global warming.

There are no acts of God to blame, just grossly irresponsible decisions and omissions by powerful people who could have made a difference but did not. Sadly, too many politicians serve more the rich oil conglomerates and electrical power companies who got them elected than they do the common good.

They don't see the bodies of the flood victims floating to the sea or the starvation in the drought-stricken African plains. They feel nothing for the loss of thousands of species of plants and animals. We need leaders with understanding of the issue and with a concern for the environment.

It is hard to believe that the human species, with the most developed brain, greatest knowledge and intelligence and the greatest technological capability ever known, could let this happen. When we see the damage we are doing to our own habitat, destroying our environment and poisoning and contaminating our own sources of food, it would appear that we are brainless and immensely foolish to do such harm to ourselves and our children and their children. We will pass on to them a poisoned planet.

The report recommends the deployment of new technology to capture and safely store below ground or process carbon dioxide. New strictly-implemented laws will be needed. This is one way to reduce global warming but there are things that can be done with political will and people's initiatives.

We need to promote healthier eating habits that depend less on beef. Millions of hectares of rainforests are being destroyed to make cattle ranches. Billions of cattle produce massive amounts of methane, an even worse greenhouse gas. The logging of rainforests must be stopped. We have to pressure politicians to implement positive alternatives and all of us can live simpler lives. It's not too late to halt runaway global warming. We can promote solar and wind power and produce ethanol for cars. Imagine the impact of millions of people going organic, recycling products, planting millions of trees, saving the Amazon and the last of the Philippine rainforest. We can do our bit by insulating houses, reducing electric power consumption, and save on heating oil. These and many more changes can make this a cleaner and cooler world. #

15th April 2007**Climate warning**

CARDINAL Keith O'Brien has warned that there is more to protecting the environment than tackling climate change. In his Easter Message, given at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh on Sunday, Cardinal O'Brien said that other issues such as over-fishing, deforestation and pollution were being ignored.

"We hear a great deal these days about climate change and we do well to heed the warnings about global warming that come to us almost daily," he said. "But we are mistaken if we consider climate change to be the only -problem, imagining that if we fly less or burn less fuel or plant more trees somehow the environmental damage will be corrected. "Yes, we must fly less and burn less fuel and plant more trees. "But ... we must take the whole picture into account when we consider the damage being done to our Mother Earth." #

Catholic Times - Extra**11th March 2007****Bio fuel is not the way ahead**

REFERRING to Angela Sutton's column on clear fuels (Science, The Catholic Times, February 11), I was dismayed to see that rape seed oil is one of the ingredients for bio fuel and that more land is being devoted for this crop. It has nasty effects on those living close by increasing hay fever, asthma and causing headache and nausea when in flower. When the flower fades, millions of the little black beetles, which are attracted to it are released into the area – which have now become part of the environment to the extent that anything yellow or white attracts them and they are infuriating! Bringing in flowers from the garden, from daffodil time onwards means black beetles on all the windows. The light of rape seed crops jars with the rest of the countryside. However, the latter are irritations but it is the effect on people's health, which is the greatest concern. **Coryn Nixon**, Bourne, Lincs

25th March 2007**Consider the bigger global impact of bio-fuel growth**

I WAS disappointed to read Agneta Sutton's column espousing the advantages of bio-fuels (The Catholic Times, February 11). The rise of bio-fuels in the right places and proportions has an important role to play in reducing greenhouse gases and global warming. However, their growth is likely to cause a greater problem than that it seeks to solve! For example, recently, in Mexico, the rise of prices of corn for US bio-fuels has resulted in a 400 per cent increase in the price of corn and tortillas and has driven thousands of Mexico's poorest people onto the streets in protest.

Forests in the Philippines have been wiped out; tribes displaced and starved, mainly in order to make way for fuels such as palm oil, one of the major bio-fuels. If all the arable land in the UK were dedicated to bio-fuels, it would support less than 20 per cent of our transport needs, and no more. The big concern for poor countries, including a large portion of Africa, is that people will be increasingly displaced and starved in order that their land supply fuel for rich westerners to drive and fly around this increasingly barren world.

Both gluttony and robbery are serious sins. The growth of bio-fuels is doing both in one go – robbing the poor and fuelling those who are gluttonous, not in food, but in fuel.

David Weight, Poole, Dorset

The Catholic Times

28th January 2007

Plan to help faithful go green

WORRIED about carbon emission but still keen to fly to on a week's pilgrimage to Guadalupe? Anxious about getting out the church bulletin but concerned over the disappearance of the rainforests? Now climate concerned Catholics can swap their red faces for the latest green information under a new scheme to help end poverty while protecting the environment.

Livesimply is the brainchild of CAFOD but it has attracted dozens of Church groups from the Charismatic renewal to the Pontifical Mission Society. A number of dioceses are also on board and more are joining every week. Livesimply challenges Catholics – and non-Catholics – to make a pledge to change something in their lifestyle and get others to do the same.

Spokesman Mark Woods said: "Whether its re-using plastic bags or more prayer, everyone can do something. "It's these small actions we hope will, like a domino effect, create a movement of people who believe they can truly make a big difference in the world. "The great thing is that pledgers won't be alone, as each promise will be supported by a virtual community of people, promising to do the same.

"So if you hit a wall in living out your promise or need some ideas, there will be people out there who will keep you going." Churches and groups can use the website www.livesimply.org.uk to see what other groups are doing and even liaise with them. Christine Allen, executive director of Progressio, said: "Decisions we take here as consumers and citizens affect poor communities thousands of mile: away. "Whether or not we buy fair trade products, reduce our carbon emission: or write to our MP. Our actions have the power to be beneficial or harmful to poor people and our environmen around the globe. "Not only do we need to press governments to adopt policies that help poor communities and the planet, we also need `to be the change we want to see'." #

4th February 2007

Is global warming out of control?

Is global warming accelerating at a faster pace than earlier anticipated? Recently, published figures are showing a higher than expected rise in carbon dioxide levels. So, are the storms that battered the UK on January 18, a foretaste of what is to come? Certainly many climate experts have warned that global warming will lead to extreme weather conditions. Storms, torrential rainfalls and severe draughts have been forecasted. The January storms that ran havoc and caused at least a dozen deaths were certainly extreme.

Extreme too were the global temperatures last year. According to the World Meteorological Organisation's records, which go back to 1861, last year was the sixth warmest year on record. This was from a global perspective. The year 2006 was the warmest year ever recorded in the UK, where records date back to 1659. As commented by The New Scientist (newsscientist.com, December 14), no part of the Earth remained unaffected. The United States experienced its warmest ever recorded January to September half-year. And New England suffered heavy rainfalls.

In Europe, the Danube flooded waste areas of land as result of melting snow and heavy rainfalls in the spring. And July was the warmest month ever recorded in Europe. Brazil and Australia also had heat waves. And Somalia was the victim of the worst drought in a decade last summer only to be afflicted by floods last December. Various parts of China were also affected by drought, while in the Antarctic the ice is melting at an increasing pace. Were these extreme conditions the result of global warming caused by carbon dioxide emissions? The figures published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Noaa) in the United States two weeks ago show that carbon dioxide levels rose at record rates in 2006 – the fourth year in a row to show a sharp a rise in carbon dioxide concentrations.

The finding are both puzzling and worrying. It is puzzling because many Scientists think that the rise is more than proportional to the steady increase in human emissions of carbon dioxide. It is worrying because some scientists think that this could mean that forests, soils and oceans are absorbing less and less carbon dioxide as global temperatures rise. On this hypo-thesis, as it got warmer, more and more of our emissions would be trapped in the air. And this would make it even harder than envisaged to curb global warming.

However, there is no scientific consensus on this matter. Human emissions could still be the explanation for the surge in carbon dioxide levels last year. Our emissions have increased significantly in the last few years. China is becoming a major contributor as are other countries, such as India, which are getting increasingly industrialised. Forest fires too might have contributed to the sharp rise in carbon dioxide levels. Also we should wait for the figures to be published by the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change before we draw too many conclusions. It remains to be seen whether these figures, which are to be published in the coming weeks, match those just published by the Noaa.

Above annual and exceptional increases in carbon dioxide levels have been seen before. In 1998 an unusual surge in carbon dioxide concentrations was attributed to the El Nino and the accompanying weather patterns in the Pacific Ocean. If the El Nino was responsible for the 1998 surge, then we might expect another exceptional surge this year, one that might surpass the one of 2006. What most scientists are agreed on is that human emissions play a major role in global warming and that this will have enormous consequences both for humans and for animals. The Stern report published in October 2006, and based on expert evidence, warned of a number of serious consequences, unless urgent action was taken to curb human emissions. Melting glaciers would increase. Flood risks and rising sea levels would displace millions. African crop yields would decline. Numerous species would become extinct.

It may be noted that, concerned about the threats to many species from global warning or other factors, the Zoological Society in London has initiated a project to save the most endangered species in the world. To start with, the scientists will focus on ten species. Among them is the Yanghtse river dolphin, an egg-laying long-beaked mammal called echidna, the jerboa, a mouse-like creature with enormous ears and the minute bumble-bee bat as well as the pygmy hippopotamus. (Those interested can visit the website: www.edgeofexistence.org)

Stop Climate Chaos is another initiative directly aimed at mobilising awareness about global warming and at putting pressure on the UK government to do all in its power to halt climate change. The coalition comprises a number of Christian organisations, including CAFOD, Christian Aid and Tearfund. Also represented are environmental and developmental organisations as well as women's organisations and activist groups.

Today, both scientific and public opinion demand concerted action from governments to ensure a safe environment for future generations. It is widely recognised, not least among the young, that we have a responsibility to leave behind us a world whose resources have not been depleted, a world no less beautiful and rich in animal life than ours. #

11th February 2007

Last chance to act on global warming

THE UN report warning that climate change was largely the result of human activity is a "final wake-up" call to avoid devastating consequences, CAFOD said this week. The report said the world's richest countries must pay up to help the poorest cope with climate change or millions would die as deserts expand or natural disasters such tsunamis become more common. The UN claims developed countries are only giving a "fraction" of what is needed to help developing countries adapt to the effects of global warming.

A CAFOD spokeswoman said the study was a last chance saloon for the west to examine how it does business and how that affects other nations. "We all face enormous challenges in how we go about what we do," she said. "It is imperative we examine how we

operate, not least the development agencies. This report is a final wake-up call. It is the work of the world's leading scientists and cannot be ignored." The report warns the world is hurtling towards a serious situation.

The UN International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report says that the poorest countries are under threat from drought, flood, sea-level rise or conflict over scant resources. Andrew Pendleton, from Christian Aid, said: "The IPCC's report shows there is not a second to lose. "Deadly greenhouse gas emissions must be stopped in their tracks and reversed.

"At the same time, the industrialised world – where the majority of emissions have been emitted – must compensate poor countries to help them adapt and survive." Mr Pendleton said Tony Blair must take a lead among the richer countries to provide the necessary finances.

The World Bank estimated that £20.3 billion a year was needed to help poor countries adapt. Christian Aid said this sum was just a starting point. "This is not aid money, this is justice," said Mr Pendleton. "The rich world owes poor countries more money than we can count for causing this problem in the first place. "It is truly outrageous that the industrialised world continues to pump green-house gases out into the atmosphere and then talks about only a few million pounds in handouts." #

11th February 2007 A load of hot air over warming

THE fear of global warming is becoming a topic with consequences in the years to come. One nation blames the other, especially in the industrial world. Scientists are bluffing on global warming, and they are misleading the world with many preconceived notions.

Global warming is there to stay and atheist scientists are trying to play God with their scientific research on this matter. As we can see with our eyes, there is no way of preventing global warming at all. Pollution gets worse every day and there is no way to stop it. Governments just talk and no action is taken to stop the terrible damage we are causing to our world. In the Book of Revelation we read: "The fourth angel emptied his bowl over the sun and it was made to scorch people with its flames" (Rev 16:8).

Professor Stephen Hawkins, one of the world's most brilliant scientists, in his famous book A Brief History of Time, predicts that the world will end with a "Big Crunch". His prediction is so close to what the Bible says. He goes on to say, "what is the nature of the universe? What is our place in it and where did it and we come from?" In his closing words he says: "If we were in time to discover a complete theory of the universe, which in broad terms would be understood by everyone, then we would all be able to take part in a discussion of why it is that we, and the universe, exist. If we find the answer to that, that would be the ultimate triumph of human reason, for then we would know the mind of God"

Is Stephen Hawkins referring to an "intelligence" far beyond our comprehension? That "intelligence" which the world does not want to submit to, is the infinite and loving God, who sustains not only the universe but also thought and emotion. Scientists cannot prove their theories. Science can explain what happens in nature, but not why. As George Bernard Shaw said: "Science never solved a problem without creating ten more."

Michael Borg, London W11 #

11th February 2007 Comment - Preparing for the worst is planning for the best

THE cull of almost 160,000 birds at the Suffolk farm where an outbreak of bird flu was discovered was completed earlier this week. Fred Landeg, the Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, confirmed the culling operation at the stricken farm in Holton was completed last Monday. Mr Landeg thanked everyone involved in the massive cull for their work and the speed with which they managed to complete their task. Vets were called to the Bernard Matthews farm after hundreds of turkeys died. Tests later confirmed the presence of the avian flu virus.

As The Catholic Times went to press, experts were still working to try to find the source of the outbreak, identified as the H5N1 strain which has killed 164 people since January 2003, mainly in Asia and the Middle East. Environment Secretary David Miliband insisted that the outbreak posed only a "negligible" risk to the general public. In a statement to the House of Commons, he also reassured consumers that it was safe to continue eating poultry and eggs. And Tony Blair joined the bid to ease public fears, with his official spokesman telling reporters that the Prime Minister was happy to carry on eating poultry.

Mr Miliband earlier defended the handling of the outbreak, denying there had been a delay in taking action at the farm. The Government said it was preparing "very seriously" for the "very remote" possibility that the disease could mutate into a form which spreads between humans causing a flu pandemic. The Department of Health has stockpiled enough Tamiflu anti-virals to cover a quarter of the population, as advised by scientists, and conducted a massive preparatory exercise last week. While no-one can fail to remain uneasy about such a discovery, the Government is evidently at pains to reassure the public that the matter is being dealt with safely.

Meanwhile, drastic measures drawn up by one English diocese in the event of a bird flu pandemic in Britain could serve as a blueprint for others to follow. Among the Lancaster Diocesan report's recommendations are the banning of receiving Communion on the tongue, the exchange of a friendly nod instead of shaking --hands at the sign of peace during Mass, and even the closure of churches for long periods to cut down the risk of infection.

It might all sound Orwellian, but the report – Pastoral Planning for a Flu Pandemic – should not be dismissed out of hand. Rather than seeing it as simply scaremongering, as some sceptics would conclude, the report is wisely looking ahead at the potential pastoral difficulties the Church would undoubtedly face in the event of such a national crisis looming. As the report's author, permanent deacon Rev Nick Donnelly, said, a pandemic – either by a mutation of the avian flu strain or another virus – is inevitable, adding that there tends to be one every ten to 25 years.

"In times of crisis, people turn to the Church, so if they are closed either by the government or ourselves, how do we continue to provide care? This report explores our options," he added. Catholics, as well as all right-minded people, obviously will be praying that such a tragedy never occurs. But to be prepared is to be well armed. #

18th February 2007 Time we all turned down the heat

By Agneta Sutton

THE Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, published on February 2, leaves us in no doubt that human emissions of carbon dioxide and other so-called greenhouse gases are playing a major role in global warming. The IPCC was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).

The recent report was prepared by Working Group 1, one of three IPCC working groups reporting this year. The report of Working Group 2 will be published in April 2007 and that of Working Group 3 in May 2007. The report, which is the first contribution to the IPCC's Fourth. Assessment Report, Climate Change 2007, has been prepared by some 600 authors from 40 different countries.

It has been carefully assessed by 600 expert reviewers and a large number of government reviewers. A study of the natural and human causes of climate change, based on 19 climate models and observations relating to climate changes, it provides projections for the future. The head of the panel, Indian climatologist Rajendra Pachauri, described it as a "very impressive document that goes several steps beyond previous research".

According to the 21-page report, "warming of the climate is unequivocal", the cause is "very likely" man-made and "would continue for centuries". In 2001 the IPCC cautiously argued that "it is likely" that humans are causing global warming. In the current report it is concluded with 90 per cent certainty that global warming is a man-made – rather than a purely natural – phenomenon. Over the last ten years carbon dioxide concentrations have increased very much faster than predicted previously.

The burning of fossil fuels by industries, by households in order to keep warm and by car drivers could in the not so distant future double carbon dioxide concentrations compared with pre-industrial levels. In the words of the report, the recent increase in temperatures is "unprecedented in more than 10,000 years". It is forecasted that, on a global average, temperatures are likely to rise by some 0.2-0.4 degrees Celsius per decade. This means an average global increase of 2-4C by the end of the century. After that temperatures are set to rise even faster. This will be accompanied by a rise in sea levels of 28-44cm by the end of the century, as Arctic and Antarctic ice masses melt.

Indeed, an additional 10-20cm is possible, if the recent dramatic melting of polar ice continues. The report notes that "the last time the polar regions were significantly warmer than at present for an extended period, about 125,000 years ago, reductions in polar ice volumes led to a four to six metres sea level rise". A change of 2-4C may not sound very impressive. But, in fact, temperature changes of these magnitudes would have enormous impacts. And no matter how much different countries try to curb greenhouse gas emission, global temperatures and sea levels will continue to rise for centuries. Of course, some of us might enjoy global warming. Kent and Sussex might be heading for a near-Mediterranean climate, which sun-lovers and those worried about their heating bills would welcome.

Exotic butterflies and birds may move north to our shores. And keen gardeners might grow orange and olive trees in our gar-dens. But all this would come at a cost, not least to the poorest parts of the worlds. Parts of Africa will sufferer worse droughts than ever. Many more millions will be at risk of starving. In other parts of the world rainfalls will increase. Heatwaves will become more frequent, threatening millions not least in Europe and the United States. Malaria might follow suit, as thriving mosquitoes might invade southern Europe and many US states. Some Pacific islands are bound to sink into the seas. Coastal areas in various parts of the world will be at risk of flooding as a result of fiercer hurricanes and storm surges.

"We are creating a different planet. If you come back in 100 years time, we will have a different climate," observed Kevin Trenbergh, Director of Climate Change Analysis for the National Centre for Atmospheric Research in Colorado. However, he warned governments not to despair but to promote efforts to reduce emissions and take measures to adapt to the changes. "The point here is to highlight what will happen if we don't do anything and what will happen if we do something," said Jonathan Overpeck of the University of Arizona, adding that the report provides a framework for the renewal of the Kyoto protocol 2012. Action, not despair, is what the IPCC panel is calling for. Paul Valdes, Professor of Physical Geography at the University of Bristol and an IPCC contributor said: "The report shows that changes to our current climate are happening more rapidly than expected, but it is not too late. "We are already committed to some climate change, but what we do in the next few years is crucial. It is possible to reduce our emissions without endangering the economy or changing our way of life. But we must start to act now." #

18th February 2007

Give man the earth and he'll protect it

EVERY ten years or so, environmental problems come to the fore and governments use a lot of energy trying to find solutions to problems such as global warming, global cooling, natural resource extraction and over-fishing. We are going through one such phase at the moment. As Catholics, we should of course think of the needs of future generations and care for the created universe. Indeed, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales published a document on the environment in 2002 – though it left much to be desired.

There are three concepts in Catholic social teaching that are often held in constructive tension and that are relevant to environmental issues.

The first is the primacy of private property and the autonomy of individuals and families.

Secondly, there is the "universal destination of goods" and the recognition that private property, though very important, is not sacrosanct.

Thirdly, there is the notion that government should always behave in such a way that promotes the "common good" generally through supporting structures in which we can fulfil our own legitimate needs as individuals, families and in voluntary associations, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

These ideas are particularly helpful to thinking about environmental problems. Can the common good and the rights of all peoples to a dignified living be properly served in the field of environmental policy by the institutions of private property, underpinned by a market economy?

Our bishops were sceptical of this approach in their document. They were also highly pessimistic. They said: 'Beautiful coasts have been turned into sewers, fertile soil lies barren or has turned into desert. Forests, often described as the lungs of the earth, are reduced to wasteland and cities are choked with smog.'

The bishops pointed out that it is where poverty exists that environmental problems are at their most acute and that property rights must be restricted to deal with environmental problems. Certainly this description of environmental apocalypse bears no relationship to the truth in the developed world or in our own country. In the UK, national income per head has more than doubled since 1970 yet energy usage has increased by only 13 per cent and aggregate emissions have fallen by 60 per cent. The output of all major pollutants had dropped to a third or a quarter of their 1970 levels by the end of the 20th century.

It is true that the poor suffer more from environmental problems. But we should be careful how we let this affect our thinking on environmental policy. More prosperous countries tend to value environmental goods more highly than people who, barely have the needs for basic living. More subtly, prosperous economies are built on foundations of secure property rights and effective legal systems so that people are more likely to pay for the environmental resources they use and are held responsible for the environmental costs they impose on others. The key to a clean environment is economic development, properly under-pinned by the enforcement of property rights, so that industrialists cannot ruin the environment at the expense of others.

As has been noted, the bishops suggested in their statement that the right to private ownership must be restricted to preserve environmental goods. This is precisely the reverse of the conclusion that most economists reach: ownership rights in environmental resources need to be defined and enforced. Communist countries poisoned lakes and rivers until they were dead as no-body had an incentive to keep them clean. In under-developed countries, if land rights are not well defined, instead of preserving and nurturing land areas for growing crops, it is farmed until it is exhausted and then farmers just move on to a virgin piece of land – often cutting down forest areas in the process.

Indeed, we cause the same problems in our management of the marine environment. Whereas farmers have an incentive to make agriculture sustainable - if the land they own is to have any value its long-term productivity must be pre-served – we fish the seas to the verge of extinction. There is no incentive to preserve fish stocks because nobody owns the seas' resources. Every individual trawler has an incentive to catch as many fish as possible and exhaust the capacity of the fish population to reproduce itself just as in countries where land rights are not defined, land is farmed to exhaustion. Solutions to environmental problems should involve extending private owner-ship, rather than restricting it as our bishops suggested.

Iceland and New Zealand provide fishermen with tradable quotas that they own and can sell. All trawler owners, as well as the government, then have an incentive to ensure that the quotas are not breached and marine life is conserved. There are signs of a similar approach towards rain forests having some success. London-based Swedish businessman Johan Eliasch has bought parts of the Amazon rainforest for the sole purpose of protecting it from exploitation.

The Anglican MP Frank Field, inspired by Eliasch's approach has, with others, developed a wider scheme increase property ownership of the rainforest. Government reserves are frequently flouted by illegal loggers, whereas Eliasch has been able to, preserve the rainforest he owns, as well as protecting the indigenous communities. Sadly, his achievements are now being put a risk by the Brazilian government. President, Lula da Silva, has announced that "the rainforests are not for sale". There are risks that Eliasch's land will be expropriated.

There are many examples around the world of how the environment is preserved by giving people ownership. In many circumstances, elephants and other 'big game' animals are a pest that will be killed by farmer and villagers in Africa. But if they are reared in, privately owned parks and if some limited trade in their products is allowed, they become valuable animals that people have an interest in preserving'. Farmed cattle are valuable in the UK, but wild cattle that nobody owned would be a menace – the same goes for elephants. In their document, the bishops applaud the Kyoto agreement on limiting greenhouse gases.

This subject is more complex than the issues discussed above. Perhaps some government action is desirable through an emissions trading scheme. Nevertheless, we should think carefully before taking action that will damage the capacity for development in the under-developed world. The climate has been changing ever since man set foot on the earth. We have to be adaptable. Prosperous, free economies are much more adaptable in the face of climate change than poor economies.

It is therefore important that we do not take action that will prevent poor countries from becoming prosperous. For 30 per cent of the world, the urgent environmental need is access to electricity and water. That will only come as a result of economic development.

In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII said that possession of property is one of the chief distinctions between humans and animals. Stable and permanent possession of property allows man to make provision for the future because that property will be nurtured and its productivity preserved and enhanced. If the bishops of England and Wales contribute further to the debate on the environment, they should turn their recent thinking upside down. They should be asking how private ownership of environmental goods can best be extended and enforced so that the environment is better protected. If our bishops remain unconvinced by the importance of that approach, a trip to industrial areas of China or of the former communist countries of Europe will provide them with plenty of evidence of how a lack of ownership of our environment leads to its complete degradation.

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18th February 2007

Enjoy your pancakes - but don't forget meaning of Lent

A LOT of people in Britain still celebrate Pancake Day, which falls this coming Tuesday. They enjoy pancakes with a good squeeze of lemon and plenty of brown sugar or golden syrup. Or they get more lavish and serve them with chocolate syrup and ice cream. But do they know why they are doing it? Pancake Day is Shrove Tuesday - the day before Lent. It is linked to the whole tradition of Carnival - of enjoying ourselves before a time of fasting and penance begins.

The word Carnival comes from the Latin word *carni*, meaning meat, and *vale*, meaning good-bye. It's goodbye to meat for the whole of Lent. Or at least, it used to be. These days, we mostly give up sweets or alcohol instead. And many people do not give up anything at all, and don't even know that it's meant to be a season of penance. Pancakes are made with eggs – which along with meat and dairy products were renounced during Lent for a good part of Europe's recorded history. Our modest family pancake parties are a part of that tradition which also gave us pre-Lent balls and dances, and also pre-Lent weddings.

By long tradition, weddings are not celebrated in Lent because having a party and lots of delicious food is hardly in keeping with a spirit of penance. Back in the 1940s and 50s, many Irish couples would marry just before Lent, and a couple of pages of 'pre-Lent weddings' would usually feature in many local papers. Today, the old tradition has been largely forgotten – although actually Canon Law does state that any weddings that do take place in Lent or in Advent must take into account the solemn nature of the liturgical season.

The name Shrove Tuesday has nothing to do with pancakes – it refers to people 'shriven' of sin. This is the old English word for receiving absolution. It comes from the same root as the word 'scrape' – we are, as it were, having our sins scraped away when we confess them and receive absolution from a priest. During Lent, there will be queues for confession in some big city churches. In London's Westminster Cathedral chairs are put down the side-aisle so that people can sit while they wait. Some people today, - however, think that confession was "abolished by the Second Vatican Council" or "isn't really relevant any more". This is not the case: the Church today teaches the importance of this sacrament with continuing vigour. The new Movements in the Church, such as Youth 2000, place a great deal of emphasis on it as a means of healing and a real personal encounter with Christ.

Pope John Paul used to go into St Peter's himself to hear confessions, and the picture of him entering the confessional, like an ordinary busy priest in a city parish, was a powerful image which appeared in the world's newspapers. To be shriven during Lent is still a central part of this season – more important than eating pancakes. Confession is still absolutely necessary if we have fallen into any sort of serious sin and wish to receive Holy Communion. Shrove Tuesday is followed by Ash Wednesday. This is always a day when churches are crowded. People line up to receive a mark of ashes on their foreheads, and be reminded that we must repent of sin. Ashes are an ancient symbol of penance and mourning – made more poignant today when cremation is a standard way of dealing with bodies after death.

Ash Wednesday is a day of fasting – just one main meal plus a light snack (the old official word was a 'collation' which sounds a bit more attractive than just snacking!) – and of abstinence from meat. It's a day when we do something very counter-cultural: we express our sorrow for sin, recognise that when we die we will meet God and be judged, and think seriously about all this.

Today, fasting is quite fashion-able: people talk a great deal about what they eat, and what they ought not to eat. There is fanatical devotion to achieving the right figure, and not being too overweight. Sometimes, people say they simply cannot help but get fat, as they cannot help eating too much or their particular metabolism means they are naturally inclined to be that way.

A doctor writing about the problem of obesity noted that under famine conditions, everyone gets thin. Perhaps the Church's attitude to fasting is the most sane one: instead of talking about dieting, counting calories, measuring our-selves, buying weight-loss books and working out special meals and routine, we should simply fast quietly, and in due season, and for the right reasons. The Bible tells us not to boast or brag, just to keep a cheerful face. Lent is a time to be close to God, and fasting and penance are a means to that end. A cheerful feast on Shrove Tuesday, and then ashes on Ash Wednesday, sets the tone for Lent. It's 40 days long, commemorating Christ's time fasting in the desert. #

18th February 2007**Tread lightly to aid future generations**

By Linda Jones - Cafod reporting

EVEN though it only seems like five minutes since Christmas – most of us are still paying the bills for the feast – Lent is already upon us. It feels like a bit of a shock to be wondering if I've got any lemons for the pancakes and I've still got some Christmas chocolates at the back of the cupboard (they must be at the back, or I would have eaten them by now!). Since it is such a shock though, maybe we could think differently this year. Livesimply is asking us to look hard at our lifestyles and make some positive changes. Lent could be a good time to start.

Perhaps you don't know about Livesimply yet? It's a network made up of 38 different and varied Catholic organisations, such as CAFOD. Members include individual dioceses like Hallam and Portsmouth and religious orders, as well as Catholic Youth Services and Catholic Charismatic Renewal for example. They all got together this year to mark the 40th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples), Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical. The encyclical focuses on the need to challenge ourselves – to consider how we can best be part of building a global community where every-one has the chance to reach their full potential. What changes could we make to our own lifestyles and choices so that we are part of the solution, not part of the problem?

The message of the Livesimply challenge is to live more simply, sustainably and in solidarity with people who are poor. Many people have already started to think about their 'carbon foot-print' – how much damage we do to the earth by our daily actions. Could you live more lightly on the earth, in order that future generations may enjoy the fruits of creation? Some of us may also have begun to think about the consumerist, materialist way of looking at the world and how it works. Does the pursuit of more and more wealth or more goods and belongings bring us happiness? Where is your real treasure? Livesimply is a spiritual, prayerful initiative – calling on us to reflect deeply about how we live, and whether we could live better, not by having more, but by being more.

Solidarity, Pope John Paul II taught us, is not a vague feeling of pity. There is much more to living in solidarity than pity. When people anywhere in the world are going hungry, something is wrong with the way the world is working and we need to take action to change it. Pope Paul VI reminded us in *Populorum Progressio* that the Church cares so deeply about people who are poor and hungry that she is "cut to the quick". He wrote: "The hungry nations of the world cry out to the peoples blessed with abundance. And the Church, cut to the quick by this cry, asks each and every man to hear his brother's plea and answer it lovingly."

How could we answer with love? Some people are already responding to the challenge of Livesimply by making promises to change: "I promise to try to use fair-trade goods", "I promise to use re-usable bags for my shopping", and "I promise to pray for half an hour a day" are just some responses to the Livesimply challenge. You can find more ideas at www.livesimply.org.uk. There may be a promise there that you could join in with, or you could even start your own promise and encourage other people to join you.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor suggested in his letter for Epiphany this year that one of the ways we could live in solidarity with people in poverty was to think about returning to the practice of fasting on Fridays. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving are of course traditional for Lent, though perhaps recently they have become a bit lost. "Giving something up" without prayer or without sharing our resources loses meaning. But with prayer and through wealth sharing as well as other actions we can really change the world.

Forty years ago this year, Pope Paul VI reminded us of the urgency of the task: "The moment for action has reached a critical juncture. Can countless innocent children be saved? Can countless destitute families obtain more human living conditions? Can world peace and human civilisation be preserved intact? Every individual and every nation must face up to this issue, for it is their problem." (*Populorum Progressio*, #80) #

18th February 2007**Saving souls to save the planet**

SCIENTISTS and politicians are telling us that the most important issue now facing humanity is climate change and global warming. Michael Borg's letter (The Catholic Times, February 11) took an interesting slant on this whole subject. It got me thinking about what really should be our 'top priority.' Should we now be reading the New Scientist instead of our traditional Catholic magazines?

I think that the secular world has a limited viewpoint on global warming. We should do all we can to stop (or at least curtail) these vast carbon emissions. Material man, however, does have limitations. There is always a higher spiritual aspect and we ignore this at our peril. As Catholics and Christians, we should look deeper. We should focus on doing God's holy will. It is in fact God (our Creator) who ultimately, is in full control of everything.

So is there anything in the Holy Scripture that can enlighten us on these world issues? It is a fact that a number of reliable witnesses have actually seen evidence of the 'Ark' on Mount Ararat in Turkey. It is reassuring to know that Almighty God promised Noah that He would never again punish the world by means of a great flood. (Genesis 9:16)

In the New Testament, Our Lord says that we should "seek first the Kingdom of God" (MT 6:33). Then every-thing else will be given to us. Later, St Peter says that at the end of time, a great heat or fire will affect the world in a terrible way. Heaven does not talk about climate change or carbon emissions. It does, however, talk about 'sin' as being the root cause of all of our troubles. Rather than the planet, God talks about the importance of saving souls.

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4th March 2007

PORTSMOUTH: Catholic environmentalist and broadcaster Mary Colwell has called for a debate in the Church over "what is the true place of humans on earth and what is the nature of our relationship with the earth?", writes Paul Donovan. Addressing the Portsmouth Diocesan Justice & Peace Conference Ms Colwell mapped out some of the major environmental threats facing the world today, including mass extinctions. "Species are going extinct at a rate of up to 10,000 times higher than would normally be expected," she said. "This level of loss puts us now in the sixth great mass extinction event in the history of the earth. The last one was the end of the dinosaurs. Unlike the previous five mass extinctions, this one is largely caused by the actions of a single species — humans." About one in three species of amphibians are seriously endangered in some way or other and more than 120 species are thought to have died out over the past 25 years," she warned. "Look at it this way, if we take away bit by bit the pieces that make up the smooth running of an engine, the earth, sooner or later that engine will stop functioning." #

4th March 2007**Factory Farming is the main suspect**

By Agneta Sutton

There is strong grounds for holding factory farming responsible for the highly pathogenic strain of bird flu virus H5N1, which is posing a global threat to man and beast. This is the view of GRAIN, an international non-governmental organisation (NGO), which pro-motes sustainable management and use of agricultural biodiversity. It is also the view of the Green Party Euro-MP Caroline Lucas. In her report, *Avian Influenza: Time to Shut the Intensive Poultry 'Flu Factories'?*, published in July 2006, she argued that the development of the lethal flu virus H5N1 "could be caused by industrial farming practices such as keeping millions of birds in cramped, warm conditions perfect for virus mutation and infection".

Her views reflected those of GRAIN. In its report, *Fowl Play: The Poultry Industry's Central Role in the Bird Flu Crisis*, of February 2006, GRAIN points a long finger to the transformation of poultry production in Asia in recent decades. "In the Southeast Asian countries where most of the bird flu outbreaks are concentrated - Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam - production jumped eightfold in just 30 years, from around 300,000 metric tonnes (mt) of chicken meat in 1971 to 2,440,000 mt in 2001. China's production of chicken tripled during the 1990s to over 9 million mt per year," the organisation notes.

In what kind of farms where the vast majority of these birds bred? In factory farms, of course! That is, they were fanned in ideal breeding grounds for viruses. And yet statements on bird flu put out by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and concerned governments "contain barely a whisper" about the threats posed to bird and human health by poultry factory farming, notes GRAIN. Instead inter-national organisations and national governments seek to direct attention to small backyard farms. But, according to GRAIN, small-scale poultry farming is "the solution, not the problem".

In the opinion of GRAIN, wild birds are not likely to spread the disease, especially as very few wild birds have been found to be infected with the deadly H5N1 virus. And "nearly all wild birds that have tested positive for the disease were dead and, in most cases, found near outbreaks in domestic poultry". What this suggests is that wild birds have been infected with the deadly H5N1 bird flu strain by domestic birds and not the other way round! Indeed, as GRAIN observes, with reference to data provided by BirdLife International, "the geographical spread of the disease does not match with migratory routes and seasons".

So how or where might the deadly H5N1 virus strain have developed? Well, poultry allowed to run outdoors is regularly exposed to milder bird flu virus strains found in wild birds — and this without disastrous results. However, the virus is then transmitted to poultry in factory farms where it rapidly mutates to highly pathogenic strains. Further evidence for this hypothesis can be presented by pointing to the case of Laos, a country with mainly small scale poultry farms where birds freely mix with wild birds, but where there is little or no contact between backyard farms and factory farms. In other words, neither mild, nor highly pathogenic, forms of bird flu virus are passed forwards and backwards between the small farms and the factory farms.

"If free-range fanning and migratory birds are responsible for spreading bird flu, one would expect to find the disease raging across the country. This has not happened. In fact, the country's backyard farms have barely been touched" — and those who have "found avian influenza in their flocks were located nearby commercial operations suffering the disease", observes GRAIN, quoting statistics provided by the US Department of Agriculture. The claim that commercial poultry farming and the transport of its products are the culprits was strongly supported by a February 2006 *Lancet* editorial, in which it was argued that it was wrong to suggest that wild birds are the main portents of bird flu and that "far more likely that to be perpetuating the spread of the virus is the movement of poultry, poultry products or infected material from poultry farms". And yet, as was added: "This mode of transmission has been down-played by international agencies, who admit that migratory birds are an easy target since nobody is to blame." It was in line with *Lancet* and GRAIN reasoning that Dr Lucas last July called for an outright ban on factory farming as a way of preventing the further spread of the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu.

She also appealed to the WHO to recommend free-range farming and keeping birds outside wherever possible. And she said that the EU should halt all imports and exports of live poultry and hatching eggs and make permanent its ban on cross-border trade in wild birds. Last but not least Dr Lucas said that "if we are to prevent another flu pandemic, we must recognise that bird flu is exacerbated by the industrialisation of our food — and that the replacement of the meat factories with widespread free-range farming will reduce the threat".

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18th March 2007**Warm, blue seas are really deserts**

By Agnetta Sutton

LIKE a candle burning at both ends, Mother Earth is melting away at both poles. The ice caps both north and south are shrinking. And according to the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the effects of global warming on the polar ice sheets might now not be stoppable. In a report to be published next month the panel puts the risk of this being the case at 50 per cent. This means that we might see vast changes to our coastlines. The seas might rise by four to six metres.

If this were to happen, many cities worldwide would be at risk of meeting the same fate as the mythical city of Atlantis, which sank into the seas never again to be seen. London and New York as well as Tokyo are potential victims. Most threatened are low-lying countries, such as the Netherlands and Bangladesh. For them flooding might mean mass-migration. Indeed, changes in global sea-levels of a mere metre or two could have enormous social, political and economic consequences, especially if the sea-levels were to rise fast — that is within the span of a few decades.

For scientists interested in marine life the melting of the Antarctic ice sheets has, however, a silver-lining — though one that could be short-lived. An ancient world of wondrous creatures, some hidden away for around 12,000 years, has been unearthed with the disappearance of Antarctic ice. The Census of Marine Antarctic Life (CMAL) project has reported findings of many species hitherto unknown to mankind. Deep under the Larsen A and B ice shelves a whole world of creatures has lived hidden for millennia.

The Larsen A ice shelf, which had been stable for some 12,000 years, collapsed 12 years ago; and the Larsen B ice shelf, which had been stable for around 4,000 years, collapsed five years ago. This has opened up a new world for exploration. Amounting to around 10,000 square km or nearly four square miles, this is a world of sizeable proportions. And it is now being studied to the depth of some 850 metres.

To their delight, scientists have discovered at least 15 different shrimp-like species, not previously known. Unknown creatures relating to coral, jellyfish and sea anemones have also been found, as well as an Antarctic ice fish with a head much like that of a crocodile. And who would have thought that they would find a new breed of octopus in these cold waters? These are not the only interesting finds in this cold world. Here creatures such as sea lilies, sea cucumbers and sea urchins, which would normally be found some 2,000 metres below the surface, thrive in more shallow waters.

For marine biologists all this is wonderful. But how will this underwater world fare if temperatures rise? No doubt the fate of many of the new-found creatures would be sealed. Indeed, increased water temperatures could have momentous implications for all sea life. All life forms have an upper, a lower, and an optimal temperature for growth, as well as an upper and lower limit of tolerance to oxygen concentrations in air or water. If they are sea creatures, they also have an upper and a lower limit of tolerance to salinity in water.

This is true not least for algae and other single-cell organisms, which constitute the first part of the food-chain for much marine life. And these small organisms are much more populous in cold water than in warmer water. Look at the bloom of algae in the spring when the surface water warms up. It soon uses up all the nutrients in the top water. And the dead algae sink to the bottom of the sea, leaving a barren surface. Hot water cannot sustain a big algae population for long. Indeed, the very reason why the warm tropical waters are so blue and transparent is that they are dead. For as the sun warms the seas and water temperatures rise above four degrees Celsius, the water expands and becomes lighter. And so the warm water floats above the colder water.

At IOC and more it does not mix with the cold water below, unless it is stirred by violent storms. In other words, it does not mix with the water that contains algae and other miniscule organisms that serve as food for other sea creatures. Thus the beautifully blue 30-100 metres deep surface layers of the warmer seas are actually marine deserts.

By contrast, the murky-looking waters in colder parts of the world are the wheat fields of the seas. Here, where the water temperature remains below IOC, the waters are well mixed from top to bottom. And algae and other miniscule organisms can be found at all levels. So here is where you expect the most fish. And here is where you find whales and seals. If global temperatures rise, the seas rich in algae will shrink. And if they shrink, so too will the populations of the many life forms which depend directly or indirectly on algae for food! #

15th April 2007

Worshippers urged to weep for the wasted earth

By James Hastings

SCOTLAND'S Cardinal Keith O'Brien dedicated his entire Easter Sunday sermon to a plea for Catholics to save God's "sacred earth". Cardinal O'Brien backed recent scientific claims that mankind was slowly killing the planet and added that today's generation was failing tomorrow's youth by ignoring the warning signs of global warming. Like Mary Magdalene weeping when she discovered the empty tomb, we must also weep for what man has done to the earth and vow to start living simply before it is too late, he said.

Speaking at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh, he said the issue was not simply about increased carbon emissions, but a whole scale neglect and waste of the earth's resources. "We are mistaken if we consider climate change to be the only problem, imagining that if we fly less or burn less fuel or plant more trees somehow the environmental damage will be corrected," said Cardinal O'Brien.

"Yes, we must fly less and burn less fuel and plant more trees. But these things alone are not enough, and climate change is not the only crisis we face. "Massive and devastating environmental catastrophes continue, unaffected by climate change or carbon emission, and we must take the whole picture into account when we consider the damage being done to our mother earth."

He said God had given mankind dominion over the earth and all it contained. But it was essential that command was not used as an excuse to cause irreparable damage and destruction. "We must, I believe, understand this instruction as we understand all other kinds of mastery, and that is in light of the witness and example of Jesus," said Cardinal O'Brien. "He taught us very clearly what it is to be a master. It is to be a servant. Far from understanding Genesis as permission to take what we like from the earth, we must consider ourselves to be at the service of the earth, every bit as much as we are at the service of our neighbour. Unique among all that God created, it is the human family that is said to be in God's image and likeness. "All the more urgent, therefore, is the demand upon us to co-operate with God in the preservation and nurture of the earth, to be servants."

Cardinal O'Brien has instructed the Justice and Peace group to produce materials and information on how Catholics can make a difference. The best solution was to live simply, he stressed. A few months ago he organised a seminar on environmental issues and while committed to change, he did not know at the time what the answer was. "As I reflect on the Easter story, I now realise the answer lies here. Where our Gospel this morning ends is where we must begin, and that is in the Easter Garden, encountering the Risen Lord," he added. "Peter and John return, but Mary stays on, weeping, and that is what we must do. We must weep like Mary, who mourned the loss of her beloved Lord, and we must weep like Jesus who saw what had become of his beloved Jerusalem. We weep because we see what has become of this creation that so delighted God in the beginning.

"Weeping gave way to something else though, and that was a mission. Mary's mission was to announce the resurrection to the disciples. Jesus' mission has been the focus of these last three days. "Our own mission is to once more honour creation, and to serve the creator through that same creation. It is a mission to live simply." Cardinal O'Brien backed recent scientific evidence on the threat facing the planet. "Only last week we saw the publication of the report on Scotland's global footprint, indicating that if all people on the earth consumed and wasted as we do here in Scotland, three Planet Earth's would be required to sustain us," he said. "We take and use much more than our share, and we cannot maintain this any longer." #

15th April 2007

Never take God's animals for granted

By Agneta Sutton

RATS are no fools, and scientists at the University of Georgia have shown that they are capable of meta-cognition, that is, they are self-aware. These findings were published online in the journal *Current Biology* on March 8. This ability to reflect on one's own cognition is, of course, one that is typical of human beings. Take for example a student about to sit an exam. Even before seeing the exam paper, the person most probably already has some sort of idea of how much he or she knows about the subject.

Humans are, however, not the only creatures who possess this ability to assess their own skills, knowledge and understanding. Primates too have this ability. But given our inability to communicate verbally or otherwise with animals about abstract concepts, it is very difficult to know what goes on in their minds. Ingenious tests have, however, been designed to find out what they think. Primates have been familiarised with particular tests designed to assess certain kinds of knowledge or understanding that they might have obtained during a training period. Say they have been taught to distinguish between hot and cold objects. They may then be given the choice of doing so or abstaining. This can be done by teaching them that if they take the test and complete it successfully, they receive a big reward. If they fail they get nothing, whereas if they abstain they get a small reward. In other words, the animals are given a chance to weigh up their chances of success or assess which option is not likely to yield a big, small or no reward.

The rats studied at Georgia University were given similar tests to study their confidence about their ability to pass a test. They were taught to distinguish between short and long bursts of sound and to press one of two levers depending on whether they had heard the long or the short sound. They were given a big food reward if they got it right, no reward if they got it wrong and a small reward if they declined from taking the test. What the researchers found was that the rats were most likely to take the test if the burst of sound was either very short or very long and thus easy to identify. In other words, when the rats were faced with easy choices, they opted for big rewards. But when the choices were difficult and they were uncertain about the answer, they would abstain from taking the test.

The research gives pause for thought. Perhaps animals are more capable of reasoning than we had thought. They are certainly conscious, but are they self-conscious? The research with the rats would indicate some sort of self-consciousness. We also know that many animals have good memories. Dogs can remember people they have not seen for ages, and elephants are said to have very long memories. Indeed, every dog or cat owner is aware of their pet's emotions. But do we always pay enough attention to the understanding and emotions of animals? What about experiments? Surely we should go easy on those, if animals are more intelligent than we thought. Are all farm animals treated as they should?

St Francis of Assisi's attitude towards animals reflected a 'stewardly' love for our fellow-creatures on Earth. He saw them as our companions towards whom we have a special responsibility before our Creator, because they need our care and respect in a way that we do not need theirs. They may be smarter than we thought. But we humans alone are capable of choosing for or against God. We are the only creatures with whom God can have a mutual bond of choice. We have a special responsibility.

Yet, Thomas Aquinas argued that we have a God-given dispensation to kill animals and use them for food. He said that "it is not unlawful to use plants for the good of animals and animals for the good of man". This was with reference to Gn 1:30 where it is written: "To every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." Secondly, he also referred to Gn 9:3 where we read: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you."

We must, however, have good reason to kill animals. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us: "We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St Francis of Assisi and St Philip Neri treated animals"(Para 2416). That said, the Catechism also

declares that it "is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing" and that "medical and scientific' experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives" (para. 2417). At the same time it warns that "it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly" (para. 2418). #

6th May 2007

Global warming debate gets heated

Vatican Letter - Carol Glat

DESPITE being held in a cool, climate-controlled conference room, some early discussions at a Vatican-sponsored seminar on global warming and climate change got pretty heated. The rifts and tensions still dividing the global debate on the causes of and remedies for drastic climatic shifts were gently simmering in the small microcosm of the two-day meeting. The seminar, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, gathered 80 experts representing the scientific, political, economic and spiritual sides of the climate-change debate at the Vatican to discuss *Climate Change and Development*.

"I have to commend the planners," said Lucia Silecchia, a professor of environmental law at The Catholic University of America in Washington, because "no-body can accuse them of bringing in a group of people who will agree with each other". Disagreements even spilled out into the corridor during the closed-door seminar's first morning break when a Vatican official had to use his pastoral prowess to calm one participant. "The scientific community has been so divided and so bitter" over the climate-change debate that experts who disagree with each other don't talk to each other, said Silecchia.

But by bringing the opposing sides together under the neutral roof of the Vatican, she said, the Church is helping give a fresh app-roach to an issue mired in conflict, confusion and, often, inaction. The Vatican is reminding people that the environment and development cannot be helped by economics, science or politics alone, "that there are moral, ethical considerations" to take into account, said Silecchia. She said policy makers have to avoid falling into the extremes that either see "the human almost as evil and destroying a beautiful planet" or consider development and technology as world saviours.

John Carr, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' secretary for social development and world peace, said Christian values seen in "the virtue of prudence, the pursuit of the common good and the protection of the poor" are important contributions to the climate-change debate and should be at the heart of policies aimed at addressing global warming. Cardinal Renato Martino, head of the justice and peace council, said the Church's concern for the environment and creation goes all the way back to the Book of Genesis. In the two stories of creation, God gave humankind the mandate to subdue and have dominion over the earth, but he also expected humanity "to cultivate and care for it", he said. Humanity's dominion over creation "does not have to be despotic" nor should it be used for purely selfish and economic needs, he said. Hurting the environment is a sin, he said, as it "is an offence not only against yourself, but against all others" whose lives depend on its resources. Nonetheless, he said, the Vatican is cautious about what sort of pronouncements it makes about global warming.

Church leaders are aware scientific findings can sometimes be skewed by special-interest groups or overblown by an audience-hungry media. The Church, therefore, "seeks to draw fully from the treasury" of all scientific knowledge and experience and looks for "a true and balanced response" based on Church teaching, the cardinal said. The Church does not want to curb sustainable development, especially in impoverished nations, nor does it see population control as a way to conserve dwindling resources. There is a middle ground, many Church leaders say, that sees sustainable economic growth, the environment and human development as partners, not enemies.

But when five per cent of the world's population gobbles up 20 percent of the earth's resources, lifestyle changes are important, said Cardinal Martino and Pope Benedict XVI. In a papal telegram to seminar participants, the Pope said he hoped the conference would foster the "research and promotion of lifestyles and models of production and consumption that respect creation and the real demands of sustainable progress of peoples". While Cardinal Martino said the seminar's purpose was merely "to educate", a number of participants said the Vatican-sponsored event could have a significant impact on how the debate is shaped. Silecchia said in some ways the environmental movement "has become its own new religion", and this could be offset by a wider recognition of the Church's own tradition of God asking people to be stewards of creation.

Australian Bishop Christopher Toohey of Wilcannia-Forbes said the Church's message of hope and love of life can offer direction and inspiration, which "is somewhat missing" in the world debate. "The Church is not just another voice telling people to conserve energy and preserve the planet. It has the potential to bring its vast tradition to shed light on a troubled human family," he wrote. The Church can "provide motivation, inspiration, love for life itself and for the earth and all of creation, to genuinely love those things and care for them". Instead of letting disagreements in the global warming debate continue to stall decisive action, "we have a Christian duty to live simple, responsible lives whether climate change is happening or not", he said. #

Beverley Today Newspaper

16th March 2007

Abstain from harmful actions

MAY I add my views to your ongoing Minster floodlighting letters. I feel strongly that the church should abstain from any actions that cause harm and distress to any of God's creatures. The Minster flood-lighting *is* causing upset to God's *wildlife*, birds etc, *who* conduct their life patterns according to natural day-light rhythms and when the sun has gone down they become confused by bright lights as nature tells them it is night-time. Birds become confused during a solar eclipse, for example.

So as glorious as the floodlit Minster undoubtedly looks, the real glories are God's living creatures, the rest of creation which Christians are instructed to consider and take care of but sadly fail to do, and the floodlit Minster is one more example of this.

The Rev Bailey writes: 'Those who contribute to the floodlights will not take kindly to a description of this glorious sight as light pollution.' Well, with respect, Rev Bailey, the important issue here is that it is light pollution and that it is distressing our non-human inhabitants! Rev Bailey, you are viewing this topic in typical church fashion, that is from the human angle only. It is not solely our world, it belongs to the rest of creation too, but the church care little for non-human flocks by leaving them out of any equation.

My big issue, with the church is just that they see things in human terms only, just like Rev Bailey is doing but all creation should matter, it does to God it should matter to Christians, especially. A recent example of this church attitude was when it spoke out against Big Brother and the Hull Casino, rightly so but people can choose to enter either, stupidly, unlike the billions of intensively reared animals and laboratory animals incarcerated in modern evil 'prisons'. Yet the church is predictably silent: I am told that it actually owns intensively farmed land, if this is true it speaks volumes. The church's real glory lies not in flood-lighting the Minster but in tackling the evil issues, which are ingrained into modern living. It's glory would be to wake up from its apparent disregard for non-human beings and to embrace the love of all creatures.

In closing and with respect, Rev Bailey, I would like to say that any memorial to a loved one should be environmentally friendly. We have got to urgently take care of the planet and *all* that live upon it. It is more than crucial to do so.

E Girling, Sigston Road, Beverley. (Active member of CVAUK)

The Catholic Herald

19th January 2007

Vatican announces summit on climate change threats

By Staff Reporter

THE HOLY SEE is planning a top-level summit on climate change which will involve many of the Church's leading figures. News of the high-level conference has been disclosed by Cardinal Renato Martino, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in a major television documentary which will be aired next month.

Interviewed for the Channel 4 programme *God Is Green*, an investigation into what the world's major faiths can do to combat the threat of global warming, the cardinal confirmed that the summit planning had been under way for several months and that Pope Benedict himself had been kept informed of events. "He is very happy with the work we do and I spoke to him about the possibility of having this meeting and he approved of it," said the cardinal, speaking from his office in the head-quarters of the Pontifical Council in Trastevere, Rome.

Officials in Rome are still planning the event, which will be a joint initiative between the Justice and Peace council and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. There had been hopes that it might take place as early as next month but, in order to guarantee a high turnout of the Church's best minds and thinkers on the subject, the summit is now likely to take place later in the year.

In early February the scientific group within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will publish its report in Paris. It is expected to contain the latest data on the various climate change indicators, such as the rate of the melting of the polar ice caps, the shift in temperature patterns and their cumulative effect on the world's delicate ecosystems. It will also make detailed observations about the likelihood of weather extremes such as droughts and floods.

In a wide-ranging television interview, believed to be the first of its kind by the Holy See specifically on the subject of global warming, Cardinal Martino talked freely about his attitudes to the use of low-energy light bulbs, frequent flying and the Vatican's own carbon emissions. Fr Sean McDonagh, an Irish Columban who has just published his own book, *Climate Change: the Challenge To Us All*, said: "I welcome this move. This is the most important moral and religious issue facing humanity. The Church has tremendous scope for effecting change. What we need now is an urgent encyclical from Pope Benedict on creation." #

19th January 2007

Comment - The climate of the Church

A Vatican observer recently pointed out that Benedict XVI has not once referred to "climate change" in his public pronouncements. What could possibly explain this reticence?

The Pope may be wary of committing the Church to the idea that human activities are causing the present alarming changes in the global climate. He may be aware that there is, as yet, no absolute scientific consensus on whether human beings are principally to blame for menaces such as global warming.

He may also be thinking back to the 1960s, when Pope Paul VI refused to lend support to the population control movement, which, with the backing of eminent scientists, claimed the world could not support rising numbers of people. Forty years later, the movement has been completely discredited.

Nevertheless, the Church must investigate the claims of environmental campaigners. And that is why we welcome the Vatican's summit on green issues. The measure of its success will not be whether the Apostolic Palace converts to energy-saving light bulbs, but whether it helps to shape a distinctively Catholic environmental ethic based on solid facts rather than grim hypotheses. #

26th January 2007

Has the church finally woken up to the threat of global warming?

This year the holy See will convene its first international summit to look at the threat of climate change. Mark Dowd reports from Rome on the 'greening' of the church and asks if the Pope is about to take a stand to save the planet

I have just finished typing in the words "*Peccatum Carbonis*. Papal Encyclical. Read. Act. Save the Planet" into my computer. The website I accessed is called, *churchsigngenerator.com* and it allows you to make your own fridge magnets and car stickers with your chosen text inserted into a ready-made template of a church sign.

Now, lest you all think I have been taking mind-altering drugs, let me explain what these are for. I have been badgering Channel 4 for well over a year about making a television programme entitled *God Is Green* in which one would examine what, if anything, the world's major faiths are saying and doing about what amounts to the biggest collective planetary emergency the world has ever seen.

I am talking about climate change/global warming: terms which are woefully timid and spectacularly understate the emerging scientific consensus about how carbon dioxide emissions are allowing mankind to take the biggest gamble ever made with the fragile state of the planet's biosphere. I assume for the sake of this article that many of you may have seen former American Vice President Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* and are well up on the facts. If not, a brief resume of the story so far.

The levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere have remained fairly constant at around 240 parts per million for the last 600,000 years or so — that is until the industrial age. The mass burning of fossil fuels, the expansion of the automobile and aviation sectors and exponentially rising levels of energy consumption to drive air-conditioning units and numerous other appliances have sent this figure soaring. It is now at 380 parts per million (ppm) and it is a safe assertion that many scientists, if not all 100 per cent of them, concur with the view that if this figure gets into the 450-500 ppm bracket we will usher in a potentially cataclysmic period in which temperature extremes will hit many parts of the planet.

Although the average temperature rise may well be in the three to five per cent bracket, this masks the fact that huge-areas will be hit by drought and flooding. Environmental refugee numbers may exceed 200 million. More than 60 per cent of the world's population lives within 30 miles of the coast: I don't have to go on. Although the evidence has been firming up on all this during the past 10 years since the signing of the 1997 Kyoto treaty, there has been very little said about all this from Catholic leaders. It is true that the late Pope John Paul II said some very fine things about the need for us all to undergo an "ecological conversion" and Australian and-American bishops have also written strong words about the subject. But if we look to Rome, we find next to nothing about global warming specifically, save for half a paragraph in the 2004 *Catholic Compendium of Social Teaching*.

That's hardly surprising for a body that is by nature conservative, preferring to wait and see what evidence emerges and check if trends and evidence amount to anything or are just a passing zeitgeist. If we look back at the emergence of Fascism, Communism and many other developments in recent history, the Magisterium was often slow to make its pronouncements known. However, time is not on our side. Many who belong to the august panel of the IPCC, the scores of scientists on the Intergovernmental Panel on climate Change, state that we have a 10-15 year period to turn round the tanker, or this whole process will develop a momentum of its own which will leave much of humanity battling to stave off extinction.

The latest report from the IPCC's scientific panel, the fruit of six years' work, is due out in Paris on February 1 and its findings are not expected to send the champagne corks flying. Many in the Church, including Fr Sean McDonagh, a Columban priest, want more from

Rome. "What we want is leadership," he says "The Church isn't like Tony Blair, worried about losing votes because of some backlash over introducing carbon taxes. It must have a prophetic voice and take risks." Fr McDonagh is no slouch on this issue. He has just completed an impressive tome, *Climate Change: A Challenge to Us All*. When pressed to evaluate the performance of the Roman Catholic Church so far on a scale of one to 10, he said he could truthfully muster only a score of one and a half to two.

Where, the Church needs to lead from the front is in stating that the very people on the planet who emit the least in CO₂ emissions – the poor and destitute of Africa and low-lying Asian countries like Bangladesh - will be the first in the firing line if and when the climate turns on us. This is why environment is the responsibility of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace inside the Holy See. Its head is Cardinal Renato Martino and it was with great expectation that I went to meet him recently in his offices just next to the beautiful piazza of Santa Maria in Trastevere. He had kindly set aside half an hour: on the day in question he was busy overseeing a conference on poverty and migration.

I began by asking him why, if this really was a huge threat, had his Pontifical Council devoted so little space to it in its *Compendium*? "This is only a first edition," he said. "We can add to it." Then he informed me that the Vatican was planning a conference on global warming to be jointly hosted by his own Council and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (a story revealed exclusively in this paper last week). So far so, good. But as I sat there opposite this smiling, diminutive cardinal, I wondered how far this subject had impacted on his life in practical terms? I fished out of my pocket a small white object and placed it across the desk in front of my interviewee. "Does your Eminence know what this is?" I asked, pointing to a low-energy light bulb. His eyes bulged. A huge smile erupted on his face. "Oh yes," he said, "I have a number of these in my home and indeed there are a number in the offices of the Vatican."

This was much more than I had counted on. When I teasingly berated him by pointing to his television on standby in the corner of the room, he looked sheepishly at me. "No, no, I normally switch it off. It is only on because I was checking something before you came in." The next thing, he would be, telling me that the Popemobile had been fitted with a catalytic converter and had plans to run off vegetable oil. So having lulled me into a sense of green complacency, it was all the more surprising when the cardinal continued: "By the way, the Holy See does not have any, carbon emissions. You see, we buy it, we buy it next door from Italy." "But you take plane flights, don't you?" I interjected. "I mean how many miles have you flown in the last week or two?" He paused. "About 50,000," he said laughing, "but these planes, they are not dependent on the Vatican!" Which is tantamount to saying that if you buy a 4x4 and clock up 20,000 miles a year, it is Ford or Toyota which are to blame and not the driver. I did point out that 50,000 miles amounted to about 23 tonnes of CO₂ emissions, but he simply laughed. "Would the Holy See not consider the merit of more video-conferencing, to cut out the flying?" He paused. "Why not? Why not? As a matter of fact, I have already had some of these but this is a practice that will improve. Oh how I wish I could do this because those trips, they are very tiring."

I suspect breaking with the flying habit may prove harder to kick than these comments suggest. Many of the men in red are veritable globetrotters (well up there with television documentary makers) and have enough air miles to fly to Pluto. A lot of them love the fuss and attention shown to them on international visits: who wouldn't? As I ended my encounter with the smiling cardinal, I knew he was flying to London the next day to meet Gordon Brown and launch an immunisation credit scheme: a bold plan to try to inoculate 500 million youngsters in the developing world by the year 2015. On his 48-hour trip to London, the cardinal would go on to be received by seven different Cabinet ministers: not the same as talking to them via a computer screen, it must be said.

On the rare occasions when you are granted an interview at the Vatican, it is customary to submit a series of written questions in advance so the various advisers can prepare a brief for their superiors. One of the questions I had tabled was: "Does the Vatican have investments in the coal and oil industries and if so, given the urgent nature of the global warming issue, would it be prudent to revise such investments?" Due to shortage of time I didn't get round to asking this one on camera, but at the end of the interview, Cardinal Martino handed me three sheets of A4-sized paper: his team had already prepared succinct answers to my list of questions. Musing on the papers over *bruschetta* in the piazza some 15 minutes later, I looked down at question number six on investments: a candid response leapt from the page: "I do not know whether the Holy See has investments in the coal and oil industries."

I did admire the directness of the reply, but I do hope he went away and checked all this out since I am sure this one is going to crop up in the future. Investment decisions are integral matters of justice and peace, are they not? I left Rome feeling relieved that, at last, the Vatican was taking an initiative on climate change in the form of a global warming summit, a move that the cardinal said he had discussed personally with Pope Benedict. But also reflected that it is going to great deal to haul this from the periphery to the centre of most Catholics' imaginations.

It may be that many of you reading this article carry the same intellectual and philosophical prejudices that I had only a year or so ago. "Greens? Atheists, tree-huggers, pantheist weirdos, I used to think. The mutual suspicion of the religious and environmental constituencies is succinctly captured by *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot, a man who described himself to me as an "evangelical atheist". "In the past, Christians have often accused environmentalists of effectively being pagans, of being earth-worshippers," Monbiot explains. "And environmentalists have often seen religions as being antipathetic to the environmental message because they put God and man – made in the image of God – at the centre of the universe and everything must revolve around him." If he had continued his theme, he might have mentioned the D-word: dominion. This is the key term used at the end of chapter one of the Book of Genesis when man is "put in charge" of creation. Some translations of this text actually talk of man being told to "subdue the earth". The language appears harsh, yet the temptation behind it, to see the material world and all God's creatures merely as put there for man's benefit and enjoyment, is a commonly held view which goes back centuries.

The early 17th-century, a period of scientific rationalism, saw the thinker Francis Bacon coming out with the following: "I am come in very truth, leading you to Nature with all her children, to bind her to your service and make her your slave ... the mechanical inventions of recent years do not merely exert a gentle guidance over Nature's courses, they have the power to conquer and subdue here, to shake her to her foundations." Bacon's contemporary, Descartes, went one step further, speaking of man becoming "lord and possessor of nature". To be fair, much of nature in the early 1600s probably looked wild and hostile to mankind. But it is one thing to soften its rougher edges; it is another for man to become a Promethean figure, seeing himself as somehow separate from the web of nature and being able to "do things to it" without there being any serious consequences. We have come too far. In Genesis, man is given "dominion" over the earth and the birds of the air and fish of the sea, but the Hebrew word from which the D-word comes has a deep sense of responsibility under God's reign which means man must steward the earth. Adam is told to "serve" the earth. In the story of Noah, God makes a covenant, not just with man, but with all of creation.

So, back to the Church. What must we do? The priority is to urgently discover a prophetic voice. A true prophet is not some superstitious crystal ball gazer. He or she paints a picture of a disturbing future that will come about if the community does not change its ways. If such a prophet succeeds and his or her warnings are heralded, the vision does not come about. My fear is that in democracies, political leaders may be afraid to take out the tough measures necessary to repair the damage. Yes, we can hope for cleaner fuel, renewable energies in the decades to come, but we are also going to have to drive less, fly less, halve energy bills through better house insulation, instal more efficient lighting and heating if we are to avert dangerous climate change. These are no longer bourgeois lifestyle fads; they are moral imperatives because the fate of millions of people may well depend on them. And before you engage in the "what can I do compared

with the CO₂ output of China?" argument, remember the charitable donations following the December 2004 Tsunami. The aggregate effect of millions of small choices can resonate around the world. Many people have heard mention of the sacrifices which took place courtesy of the "wartime spirit," but are too young to actually recall them. It is time to invoke a return to such values. In short; we need to be involved in nothing less ambitious than what one scientist has called "a species-wide call to self-limitation". And if our 'politicians won't lead, then step into the vacuum, please, people of faith, and leaders especially. Will imams encourage Muslims to limit their flights to the annual Hajj at Mecca to shrink that footprint? (Islam's colour after all is green, giving it a branding advantage!) Will the Vatican use video-conferencing for its cardinals and hack down the air miles? Think of the inter-faith possibilities of uniting disparate religious communities around this one issue.

Think of the appeal to youngsters, many of whom in the West have given up on institutionalised religion as "boring and irrelevant", to find a group of cardinals who will not live to see the worst of possible climactic disaster, nevertheless, passionately arguing the toss over the environment and the future of the planet. And there are signs of hope if you look for them. Take the United States, a country which, under President George Bush, has continued its opposition to the 1997 Kyoto Treaty on cutting CO₂ emissions. Americans, although constituting just five per cent of the global population, emit one quarter of the world's carbon dioxide.

Many in the evangelical wings of Christianity in the country sincerely believe that we are living in the end times and that global warming may well be God's way of punishing human wickedness and ushering in the Second Coming. If you hold such views, there is no point in trying to stop it. Indeed, to do so might be standing in the way of the divine will. Such opinions are, quite frankly, repulsive and founded on such an unreconstructed view of a vengeful Godhead that on theological grounds alone, would scarcely merit mention. Except they are views which are deeply held and are 'a reality we have to deal with. But countering this is a whole new group who have formed the Evangelical Climate Initiative. Hundred of leading pastors have signed up for action in America, courtesy of an inspirational man from Britain, Sir John Houghton. Sir John is not only an evangelical himself, he was also a key figure at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change from 1988 to 2001. In a series of talks to American Christians, he persuaded them of the scientific facts behind his case and managed to get them to cast off their old views about an exploitative approach to creation and embrace the notion of stewardship.

The result? Thousands of unlikely citizens from the Bible Belt and beyond are now ready to make the climate a central issue in the 2008 Presidential election. If these people can change their mind then anything is possible. The Roman Church, of course, is universal, and has a centralised teaching authority. It is uniquely placed to make an impact if it chooses to do so. But will it? What will be the outcome of that conference later this year at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace? The theologian Bernard Lonergan once famously said the Church often arrives "a little breathless ...a little late". It is time to prove that perception wrong.

Mark Dowd's documentary 'God is Green is scheduled for broadcast on Channel 4 on Monday February 12, at 8pm #

2nd February 2007

The Church is not late to the green debate

I was quite startled by Mark Dowd's attack (Feature, January 26) on the Church's record on the environment, bearing in mind the position the Church has always taken since industrialisation. No doubt Mr Dowd will have been complicit, along with most scientists, in accepting modern destructive economic systems up until very, very recently. The Church never has accepted these systems and has always preached against greed and the subsequent waste and destruction both of human beings and the land that follows.

The 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* was the primary influence upon the originators of the theory of distributism — those great thinkers G K Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. Many people in the early part of the 20th century were extremely worried about the absurdities that industrialisation had created both within socialist systems and capitalism. Distributism was much derided by politicians and economists (with the exception of the great Cambridge economist E F Schumacher, of *Small is Beautiful* fame). The socialist George Bernard Shaw mocked distributism as a system of "three acres and a cow". Wealthy industrialists and financiers had a vested interest in ensuring that the idea never saw the light of day in powerful circles. The distributist movement had thousands of supporters however, but it needed a serious change of heart and not a few steps backward away from the overly industrialised route of greed.

Mr Dowd is quite right when he describes man's role as one of "stewardship" of the planet. I would urge him and others to take a serious look at the work that was done years ago by the distributist movement. Having several dustbins, taxing motorcars and stopping a few flights are gestures, as were catalytic converters. We all know that sticking plasters are useless for serious illness, as the problem is far more fundamental.

I would urge others to take a close look at the work done by the Church and then by distributists, but beware of the myriad counter arguments put by the vested interests of greed. Allow the arguments for a sane economy to speak for themselves, I would urge the Catholic press to explore these great debates and ideas as part of their contribution to saving our planet and the millions in the Third World who will ultimately suffer the most.

Yours faithfully, **Martin Thomson** Luton, Beds

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2nd February 2007

Lambs to slaughter

From the general secretary of Catholic Concern for Animals

SIR - Can any reader say what happens to the two lambs blessed each year by the Holy Father (World Bulletin, January 26)? After their wool is used for palliums, do they live out their natural lives in peace and safety?

Yours faithfully, **DEBORAH JONES** Cheltenham, Glos

#

20th April 2007

Vatican Notebook - Is even the Vatican now going green?

The Vatican has, until now, resisted turning green. Years of having to deal with radical environmentalists whose ideology demonised man as central to the world's environmental problems, from which support for abortion and population control logically followed, left the Vatican deeply suspicious of the movement. But today, as the science of climate change gains credibility, environmentalist groups have become respectable, even among some cardinals. Furthermore, as they appear to drop their pm-abortion agenda of the past, so the Vatican is starting to pay closer attention to what, not long ago, it regarded as the domain of anarchists and Marxists.

Still, the Church is continuing to play a cautious game. At the end of April, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace will host a seminar on climate change, but it won't be like a UN conference or one sponsored by the British Government. Instead, believers, agnostics and sceptics of the environmentalist movement — mostly from the world of academia — will take part in the two-day conference beginning on April 26.

A handful of politicians and public figures will also be on hand. From Britain, these include Viscount Monckton of Brenchley, an outspoken critic of environmentalism who sees earth worship as becoming a fundamentalist religion that lacks a healthy scepticism. He will be contrasted by a fervent backer of the science, Environment Secretary David Miliband, who has been asked to attend by Gordon Brown. The Chancellor, who has built up a warm rapport with Council president, Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, was unable to participate due to impending elections.

For Cardinal Martino, the seminar is not about the Vatican giving support to the science of climate change – at least, not yet. Rather, he says the event will help the Vatican "assess the situation" and "elaborate on the Holy See's position".

He acknowledges the harm mankind is inflicting on the environment, but wants to withhold judgment until after the seminar. The cardinal, as he loves to do, points to the Compendium on the Social Doctrine of the Church as showing the way towards a responsible stewardship of creation. But he is wary of the religious tendencies of the green movement, and is unwilling to deal with anyone who views safeguarding the environment as a creed in itself. "The common good is something everyone can contribute to," he says, "but definitely not the high priests of this new religion." #

27th April 2007

Living simply will heal the earth, says nuncio

From Dennis Sadowski in Columbus, Ohio

EVERY Catholic can do something about climate change by adopting a life of voluntary simplicity, the Vatican's United Nations nuncio has said. It comes down to "working less, wanting less, spending less", thus reducing the impact each person has on the environment, Archbishop Celestino Migliore told participants gathered in Columbus for the second in a series of regional Catholic conversations on climate change last week.

Citing the call in Genesis to humanity to oversee creation while protecting it and the Church's social doctrine, the Vatican diplomat outlined the Holy See's position on the need for Catholics to heed the environmental dangers the planet faces. "The denigration of the environment has become an inescapable reality," the archbishop said.

"There is no doubt that the latest assessment has established a strong connection between human activity and climate change," he said, referring to a February statement by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Archbishop Migliore acknowledged that although not all scientists agree that climate change is occurring, other environmental threats, such as indiscriminate deforestation, water pollution, the lack of potable water in many parts of the world and the depletion of fish stocks, demand action from the world community and individual Catholics alike.

"We need to drink deep from this frustrating foundation of knowledge and wisdom, known as the aggressive and progressive degradation of the environment, that has become an inescapable reality," he said. Archbishop Migliore said that God placed humans in the Garden of Eden with the instruction not only to tame nature, but to keep or preserve it as well. God's instruction was not so much a commandment but a blessing "to perfect, not destroy, the cosmos", he said.

Any steps to protect the environment must depend on more than the use of technology and traditional economics; they must depend on "ethical, social and religious values as well", he said. Likewise, any corrective steps require turning to people in the developing world, especially those living in dire poverty, and making decisions with their advice and consent, the papal nuncio said. "With humans open to love, creation becomes the place for the mutual exchange of gifts among people," he said.

The Ohio conference was the second of three gatherings being held across the country to address the Catholic response to climate change. The first was in Florida in March and the third will be on June 2 in Anchorage, Alaska. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops is convening representatives from across a broad spectrum of society for a thorough discussion on climate change.

The conference reflected that desire by involving representatives from utility companies, a consumer group, environmental organisations, agriculture, higher education, state government, local parishes and diocesan social action offices: Don Misleh, executive director of the 10-month-old Catholic Coalition on Climate Change and a conference planner, said the bishops are looking for steps that "make sense" and that are consistent with Catholic values. The American bishops' conference is a major supporter of the coalition.

"The public policy remedies are very complicated," Mr Misleh said. "We're more in a mode of learning and listening instead of a mode of prescribing solutions." He expects it will be at least six months before the bishops back any of the climate change bills pending in Congress. #

20th April 2007

Pope under pressure to shun fur trade

Christy Turlington and other famous supermodels in pledging not to wear fur? The Pontiff's fashion sense has come under scrutiny again and this time it's not because he wears Prada shoes. The Italian Anti-Vivisection League has asked the Pope last week to commit an act of Christian charity and stop wearing fur. Giving up fur, the animal rights group argues, would be of "great religious and ethical significance". This appeal comes ahead of an April 22 visit to Italy's furrier capital, Pavia, where he will receive a fur cape made of white ermine pelts.

Vatican tailors are also said to have ordered a custom-made fur hats from Pavian furriers, according to the Catholic News Service. The Pope, who has been known to wear an ermine trimmed red-velvet hat called a "camauro" in the winter, has not yet made a public reply. His recent predecessors refrained from wearing this traditional papal hat in public and the "camauro" was last worn by Pope John XXIII. #

1st December 2006 Christmas Letter to the Church Times (Unpublished)

Sir, - Christmas is once more almost upon us and I am writing to appeal to all Christians to give thought to the ghastly way in which they celebrate the birth of the Lord of life and compassion with the cruel slaughter of millions of animals and birds.

Most will not even be aware that the custom springs not from Christianity but from pagan festivals which were held long before the birth of Jesus. Could it not be that the inclusion of adoring animals in the birth scene has a deep significance which is conveniently overlooked?

At any rate, would it not be good to know that no animal or bird had suffered or lost its life for our celebrations? This is by no means impossible, and recipes, sermons and other information are available on request from the address below...'

The address was for the Fellowship of Life; the letter appeared in the December 12 1975 edition of the Church Times and the author was FoL founder Margaret Lawson (1919-2006).

In the decades which followed Margaret's letters were published in many Church papers* whilst FoL literature was made available to promote awareness of non-human suffering amongst churchgoers. The central aim of the Fellowship of Life is today embodied by the Christian Vegetarian Association of the UK. However a website was set-up this year to preserve Margaret Lawson's influential writings and record the growth of non-secular concern for creation in Britain, since the early 1970's.

It may well be of interest to Church Times readers: www.all-creatures.org/foL

Yours Faithfully, **John Gilheany**

Church Times

2nd March 2007

First catch your gazelle

by Rachel Harden

AVOID eating cheetahs and pigs; enjoy beef, lamb, and locusts; keep alcohol and caffeine intake to a minimum; consume dairy products only in moderation; but enjoy all foods from the plant kingdom.

Following these guidelines will, not only make you healthier but closer to God, suggests the author of *The Creator's Diet: Biblical insights for healthy eating*, Nicola Burgher.

Ms Burgher, a registered nutritionist who holds an M.Sc. in Nutrition from King's College, London, outlines in the book how the Bible contains a comprehensive list of foods for a healthy diet. Her aim, she says, is to "explore biblical dietary principles and learn what kind of foods God views as suitable for consumption".

Quoting texts from Genesis, the author describes how all plant foods are essential to a healthy God-given diet, fruit and vegetables as well as starchy carbohydrates.

The book does not say that it is wrong to eat meat; nevertheless, the author suggests that the Bible deems certain meats fit to eat and others unfit. The latter category includes cheetah, kangaroo, and pork, as well as a range of shellfish. Acceptable meats include beef, lamb, giraffe, and gazelle.

Organic products are applauded - as the most natural way of producing food with the least toxins, but the author admits they can be expensive. "If you cannot afford to purchase organic produce, then do not despair. At the very least you should wash and peel your vegetables and fruits, and try and purchase free-range products."

The author also warns of the health dangers of concentrated amounts of stimulants such as alcohol, tea, and coffee, as well as their addictive nature.

"It is therefore wise to avoid them where possible. The negative effects far outweigh the benefits. If you think you cannot do without them in your diet, then you may have an addiction, or you may have made the substance an 'idol'."

A section is devoted to alcohol, includes Bible passages and health warnings. The author concludes that, although the final decision must be down to personal convictions, "the best form of prevention is always total abstinence."

Ms Burgher dedicates the book to her late father, the Revd M eland Burgher, who died of cancer in 2004. "I saw first-hand the value of nutrition in his life. Good nutrition enabled him to survive longer than the doctor's prognosis."

The *Creator's Diet* costs £5.99 (978-0-959551-08-7); details at www.pneumasprings.co.uk

#

11th May 2007

Down on the Farm

By Gillean Craig

JUST BECAUSE Molly Dineen is a personal friend doesn't stop me thinking that her documentary *The Lie Of The Land* (C4, Thursday of last week) was terrific.

This account of farming in England today had a surprisingly unfamiliar theme — surprising, because murder is the subject of so much television. But here, death was dealt not to humans, but to lesser creatures, the ones we're supposed to look after. It was all about killing animals.

Wanting to explore rural opposition to the ban on hunting with hounds, Ms Dineen immersed herself in the life of an amateur hunt in Cornwall. What she found was totally at odds with the popular stereotype: this was raw, rural poverty — people just about scraping by, and very much aware of those neighbours who have given up the struggle in recent years.

Nowadays, apparently, farmers have only two options in disposing of dead animals: they can take them to the nearest abattoir — which will probably be half a county away, and will charge £70 — or they can give £4 to the local hunt, who will skin the beasts and feed them to the hounds. One farmer could afford only £2 and a packet of home-made fudge.

But most of the animals are not dead — the hunt knackerman is called in to kill perfectly healthy animals because they are not economically viable. The profit margins of milk and beef production are now so wafer-thin that huge numbers of animals are simply valueless.

This poetic film was fired by righteous indignation, by anger that we put so little value on living creatures. What we really care about is cheap food and the size of supermarket dividends.

Ms Dineen achieves her object by being an innocent, almost a naive, presence: although we don't see her, we know that she is carrying the camera, and we hear her asking questions. We see her being invited into farmhouses. By building up this bond of trust, she enables people to speak openly to the camera.

This was not a blockbusting objective investigation; there was no attempt to hear the other side of the debate. But I suspect that it will have made many viewers question deep-seated assumptions. One curious effect was that the manner of its making helped me, the most squeamish of individuals, not to turn away from the shocking sight of, again and again, a humane killer being pressed to the forehead of a healthy, beautiful animal, so that it could be dispatched — another victim of our abject failure as stewards of God's creation.

A historic global perspective of the reality behind the rural idyll was provided by Edwardians in *Colour: The wonderful world of Albert Khan* (BBC4, Thursday of last week). Mr Khan, a wealthy pacifist, commissioned photographers to travel the world taking moving and still images of everyday life, convinced that this would encourage inter-national interest and understanding.

Unfortunately, this was on the eve of the First World War, and, with hindsight, what we see in these beautiful pictures is a growth in nationalism, and grinding poverty at odds with industrialised wealth. Religion, too, expended its energies on emphasising difference — differences to be ironed out in the name of the One True Faith.

#

Church of England Newspaper

9th February 2007

Somebody must pay!

by Luke Cawley

The chicken looked queasy and everybody ran. "We're all going to die!" they cried as a thousand fears raced through their terrified minds. Does this sound familiar? No... it's not a surreal children's book. It's actually the week's biggest news head-line.

The media is in a frenzy with stories of bird flu. The illness has struck a farm in Suffolk, killing hundreds of birds. Some 159,000 turkeys have been slaughtered in a responsive attempt to contain the disease. And while it is, without a doubt, tempting to milk the satirical and humorous potential of the story, one is compelled to pause and consider what a devastating blow this is for the livelihoods of British farmers. Bird flu, like foot-and-mouth disease before it, will potentially trigger a series of livestock culls and also limit British meat exports. One doesn't need a vested interest in British farming to empathise with the fear of impending economic hardship felt by many agricultural workers across the nation. The effects of bird flu on poultry farming are potentially disastrous.

It is not, however, the damage to turkeys and their owners' businesses which most preoccupies the wider populace. It is, rather, the possibility of human casualties: The specific variety of bird flu found in Suffolk — the Asian strain of the H5N1 virus — has, in other countries, infected and killed over 160 people in the last three years as a result of bird-to-human infection. The publicly-stated fear of many groups - including the World Health Organisation and the NHS — is that the virus will mutate and develop transmissibility from human-to-human. If such a mutation were to occur then it could well lead to hundreds of thousands of human fatalities.

The British government's key figure in the crisis is Ben Bradshaw, the Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Bradshaw, who is both openly gay and also a committed churchgoer, stands out from most other government ministers as one who actually has a history of thoughtful involvement in the area for which he now holds ministerial responsibility. Not only is he the MP for a rural Devonshire constituency but he also, during his first year or so as an MP, introduced the Pesticides Act, regulating the use of chemicals in farming.

It is Bradshaw who faced the wrath of many newspapers this week in the after-math of events on Suffolk; many journalists suggested that the government had been sluggish in its response to the bird flu out-break. One is hard-pressed, however, to conceive of any swifter possible response than the officially-sanctioned gassing of the birds which was ordered immediately the virus was confirmed. As Bradshaw remarked on Monday, "We get reports all the time of suspected bird diseases. If we were then to put 31;1m or 10km [quarantine] zones in before we had confirmation, we would put a lot of unnecessary restrictions on a lot of very unhappy farmers." It made sense not to rashly order a premature cull.

So why did so many newspapers choose to criticise Ben Bradshaw? Could it be that most Brits -- journalists included -- have become accustomed to the nationally-pervasive tendency to respond to tragedies by hunting out a figure whose "head must roll"? There does seem to be an assumption that someone must be personally responsible for every unhappy occurrence. If something goes wrong for us, then we must sue the doctor, demote the cabinet minister or sack the teacher. Somebody must pay!

It's not a bad thing, of course, to hold ourselves and others to account for our actions. Where the "blame game" breaks down, though, is during times of actual or rumoured natural disaster. There are events — and bird flu may be one of them - when no living human being is directly responsible for what is happening. The search for a scapegoat can, in such scenarios, simply be a vain attempt to regain a sense of control in a situation.

If someone is found to be responsible, then we can at least have the comfort of knowing that there are no forces bigger than us and no events beyond the human capacity to prevent. Is blaming Ben Bradshaw (or his equivalent in similar situations) actually a way of shielding ourselves from the overwhelming realisation of our own mortality can be induced by flu pandemics, tsunamis, earthquakes and the like? Is Britain's blame culture partly a manifestation of a culture ill at ease with thoughts of its own mortality and with the fact that human ingenuity cannot resolve every situation?

And how, as Christians, can we make a thoughtful and missional response to the growing sense of existential anxiety that could be accentuated by any further spread of the bird flu virus? #

9th February 2007

Oxford issues advice on bird flu

By Julia Buettenbender

DUE TO continuous worries surrounding Avian flu the Diocese of Oxford has issued advice to clergy and pastoral leaders on the apparent dangers of the disease. It advises its clergy to "be sensitive to those who are concerned by a possible outbreak of Avian flu" and is calling on them to reassure people that there is currently 'no evidence' that the virus can be passed on from human to human.

In addition, special attention should be paid to those whose livelihood depends on their live-stock's health. "Recent farming figures show that farming income last year was once again low and so those relying on their poultry to top up their income could be seriously affected, as of course, could those larger poultry farmers who rely entirely on that for their livelihood," the website advised.

Keepers with over 50 birds should register their flock and keep in close and direct contact with Defra (www.defra.gov.uk). Defra should also be contacted in case of sightings of suspicious dead birds. In order to publicise the helpline numbers, the diocese recommends circulating the Farming Help number, also available on a yellow laminated pocket-sized card, around the parishes.

Finally, people should be encouraged to continue eating eggs and other poultry, as there is no evidence of danger, the web-site insists. To emphasize his advice, the Diocesan Rural Officer Glyn Evans points out the importance for the population not to panic, but to remain 'informed'. For more details see www.oxfordanglican.org #

13th April 2007

Easter egg joy

Sir, It's not usual for a man of my mature years to get excited over an Easter egg, but I got a very special one this year. Every year millions of laying hens are sent to slaughter at 18 months. Two weeks ago a farmer, in co-operation with Brighton Animal Action, spared 750 their usual fate and on Easter Saturday I drove four of them to their new home to live out their lives. On arrival, we found one had laid an egg. This trip made the whole Easter spiritual experience special for me: the journey of a few of "the least of these" from death to new life, and their gift to me of an Easter egg.

In his Easter message the President of Slovenia (see next page) questioned the mass slaughter of animals to celebrate religious festivals (text on www.evana.org/index.php?id=21087&lang=en). My own experience too is that it's a spiritual uplift not to have an innocent slaughtered lamb or chicken on the plate to celebrate the new life given by the guiltless Lamb of God.

Barry Miles, Uxbridge #

from www.evena.org (see previous page)

2007 Easter Message by the Slovenian President Dr. Janez Drnovšek:

"The Easter Holidays are near. Let's spend them in peace and good company. You can also renounce the ham, chocolate-eggs should be sufficient for an Easter atmosphere.

Would it not be more harmonious if we did not associate religious celebrations directly with ham and other non-spiritual symbols? Do really so many animals have to die when we celebrate higher consciousness and try to develop spiritually? The answer is clear: of course not.

Feasts don't have much to do with spirituality, just the opposite. Even considering that we can try to understand that in some eras, in which food was scarce, religious events were celebrated with banquets, we can now leave such material remnants behind us. True spirituality does not need them, just the opposite, because they show us that religions demanding such identifications got stuck at a relatively low level of consciousness.

That's why we'll try to celebrate the occasion differently this time. We use the opportunity for a walk in nature, for a cleansing of the spirit, for the search for internal peace. We are friendly to our family, our neighbours and all those suffering in this world. Also to animals. We spare them this time from our lust for meat and we try to overcome historical behavior patterns. We will do something good for our spirit and our body."

Sunday Times

26th November 2006

Father of animal activism backs monkey testing.

THE father of the modern animal rights movement has endorsed the use of monkeys in research by an Oxford professor at the centre of anti-vivisection protests. Peter Singer, who is widely admired by activists for writing the seminal work on animal rights, says giving the primates Parkinson's disease was "justifiable" because of the benefits it subsequently brought to thousands of human patients. His comments will come as a blow to the protest group SPEAK, which is trying to halt construction of a new animal research laboratory at Oxford.

In a documentary to be screened tomorrow on BBC2 Singer, a professor of philosophy, comes face to face with Tipu Aziz, an Oxford neurosurgeon whose research involving monkeys has helped to develop pioneering ways of treating Parkinson's disease.

During the exchange Aziz tells Singer: "I am a surgeon and also a scientist, and part of my work has been to induce parkinsonism in primates ... I was one of a group internationally that showed that an area in the brain that was never associated with parkinsonism ... was overactive, and by operating on it, reducing its activity, one can significantly — very significantly — improve Parkinson's. "To date 40,000 people have been made better with this, and worldwide at the time I would guess only 100 monkeys were ..used at a few laboratories."

Singer replies: "Well, I think if you put a case like that, clearly I would have to agree that was a justifiable experiment. "I do not think you should reproach yourself for doing it, provided - I take it you are the expert in this, not me — that there was no other way of discovering this knowledge. "I could see that as justifiable research."

Singer, a former Oxford lecturer now working in America and Australia, paved the way for recent animal rights activism with his book *Animal Liberation*, now considered the bible of the movement. He said last week that he stood by his comments to Aziz, provided the monkeys had been treated as well as possible. Aziz said: "It just shows (SPEAK] haven't a case, to be honest"

But Mel Broughton, one of the leaders of the SPEAK campaign, said of Singer's justification of the Oxford experiments: "I would not accept that at all. "[His comments] certainly do not represent the views of SPEAKS or the vast majority of people that campaign against animal research." *Monkeys, Rats and Me: Animal Testing* is on BBC2 tomorrow at 9pm.

3rd December 2006

Setting limits on animal testing

YOUR story, *Father of animal activism backs monkey testing* (News, last week), has led some readers to conclude that I have changed my position on using animals in research. Since I judge actions by their consequences, I have never said that no experiment on an animal can ever be justified. I do insist, however, that the interests of animals count among those consequences, and that we cannot justify giving less weight to the interests of nonhuman animals than we give to the similar interests of human beings.

If an experiment on a small number of animals can cure a disease, that affects tens of thousands, it could be justifiable. Whether this is 'really the case in Professor Aziz's experiments, about which I was asked in the BBC2 documentary *Monkeys, Rats and Me: Animal Testing*, is a question I have not studied sufficiently to offer an opinion about. Certainly it has been disputed.

In my book *Animal Liberation* I propose asking experimenters who use animals if they would be prepared to carry out their experiments on human beings at a similar mental level — say, those born with irreversible brain damage. I wonder if Professor Aziz would declare whether he considers such experiments justifiable. If he does not, perhaps he would explain why he thinks that benefits to a large number of human beings can outweigh harming animals, but cannot outweigh inflicting similar harm on humans. A prejudice against taking the interests of beings seriously merely because they are not members of our species is no more defensible than similar prejudices based on race or sex.

Professor Peter Singer - University Center for Human Values - Princeton University

Methodist Recorder

8th March 2007

Thought for Food

WHILE on the subject of food, John Gilheany from the Christian Vegetarian Association of the UK has been in touch. He writes: "There have been several historical figures within Christendom who have embraced vegetarianism in later life, including John and Charles Wesley, C H Spurgeon and General William Booth. In most cases, Christians who have inclined towards or adopted vegetarianism would cite health or ascetic reasons, for their dietary preference. However, Lord Soper, when asked if he believed Jesus to have been a vegetarian, famously replied: 'No, but if he were around today, I think that he probably would be.'"

He feels that large numbers of young people, in particular, have left the Church because of perceived and rife indifference towards animal suffering and exploitation. He continues: "Western society is abundantly blessed to the point where any supermarket trolley could be filled 10 times over without a drop of animal blood being spilt. Surely to those to whom much has being given much will always be expected; and in ways which require us to reflect upon our everyday witness to the coming kingdom." For those interested, CVAUK has a web site (www.christianvegetarian.co.uk) and can be contacted at: CVAUK, Foresta, Pines Road, Liphook GU30 7PL.

Would you like to write articles for your church magazine but do not know where to begin?

Below is a sample of articles written by **Marcelle Williams**, Committee member of The Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals and a member of CVAUK.

The articles were written for her church magazine (All Saints - Wokingham)

Magazine - All Saints, Wokingham

March 2007

Factory Farming Continues Apace

The true cost of continuing factory farming is exemplified by the outbreak in Suffolk of bird-flu in one of Bernard Matthews turkey farms. Rearing 160,000 turkeys on one farm is factory farming on a grand scale. His company had been importing 37 tonnes of partly-processed turkey meat from Hungary every week when the identified strain of bird flu was found at Bernard Matthews farm in Holton.

Animals are no longer treated as individual beings but more like production units – eggs, milk or meat-producing machines.

There was sad news in the spring issue of "Farm Animal Voice" the magazine of Compassion in World Farming about the death of Peter Roberts M.B.E. its Founder. He was a true pioneer, a dairy farmer who became appalled at the direction of post war farming in terms of animal welfare. He set up C.I.W.F. in 1967 and he saw it grow from a personal protest in his back room to the leading international force for farm animal welfare that it is now. He started the campaign in Europe which resulted in the E.U. legally recognising animal sentience in what is known as the "Amsterdam Protocol", signalling an official sea change in attitudes to animals. In 2002 he was awarded the M.B.E.

His daughter Helen Engelen said that the three most important things in Peter's life were his family, his spiritual beliefs and his campaigning for farm animals.

Marcelle Williams

April 2007

A new CD has been produced by PETA – People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals – called "Nonviolence Includes Animals". It has a special introduction by member of Congress Dennis Kucinich at PETACatalog.org. It contains the address by PETA President Ingrid E. Newkirk at the International Nonviolence Conference in Bethlehem. It was the first time anyone had been invited to discuss the principles of non-violence as they relate to animals at an international peace conference.

She said that how we treat animals may determine whether we can overcome the single most basic problem facing all those who work to end conflicts. People need persuading to feel empathy for those they believe are inferior and who they think have interests that are of no importance. Our resistance is taught and instinctual, it is not intellectual. To rid people of these biases takes thought and effort. Ingrid spoke of the account by author Loren Eiseley of his experience with two sparrow hawks. When he was living in a cabin in a desolate wilderness he trapped two sparrow hawks, a male and a female to ship to a zoo far away. The trapping was at night and he slipped in the dark as he was moving the birds into a box. The female escaped and flew off.

The next morning he built a cage for shipping the bird then took the bird, a young male, carefully out of the box. The bird lay in his hands and looked beyond him and up at the sky. He put the bird on the grass, offering him his freedom, where he lay for a minute then was gone like a flicker of light! Eiseley recalls that the bird flew up beyond his sight, then from far up there was a cry. He said his heart turned over when he heard the cry from far up. He looked up and saw the bird's mate soaring far above. Then Eiseley heard from far up, ringing from peak to peak, a cry of ecstatic joy as the two birds met in a soaring gyre and a whirling circle until they were gone high in the sky. Practising non-violence in the face of violence requires great strength yet it is simple to act compassionately as Eiseley decided to do. We should ask ourselves: "Don't animal mothers experience love? Don't animals scream if we burn them? Don't they deserve freedom from captivity as we do?" Non-violence is not difficult.

Marcelle Williams

May 2007

This month's ASWA Committee meeting was in Lambeth Palace which was an interesting venue and we were able to talk with the Archbishop before the meeting. The chairman of the committee is Bishop Richard Llewellyn who was the Bishop at Lambeth before he retired, the Archbishop's bishop. Bishop John Austin Baker, former Bishop of Salisbury, is also on the committee and he is coming to preach at this year's Service of Thanksgiving for Creation and Blessing of Animals at All Saints.

At the meeting we discussed the ASWA Service of praise prayer and teaching at St John's Church, Waterloo on 15 April at which the speaker will be Dr. Tony Campolo. He will be speaking on "A Christian responsibility for the Animal Kingdom". After the meeting we saw through the window a handsome fox exploring the garden!

There is so much cruelty to animals still going on of which the man in isle street and the person in the pew know little about. Britain still imports over 4,000 tonnes of foie-gras every year and is one of the world's largest consumers. The government refuses to end this trade because it would be a restriction of Free Trade.

30 million little female ducklings born in France are tossed alive into electric mincers at a few days old to suffer a violent and horrific death-their punishment for not being able to put on weight as quickly as males. Those not shredded alive are forced to ingest food in such obscene quantities that their livers react and swell up to 10 times their natural size. These diseased livers are then sold as 'high class' cuisine.

The birds are forced into metal cages that hold them captive preventing them from stretching their wings or escaping the torture of forced feeding.

M and S still use the farrowing crate which blights the lives of breeding sows that face a lifetime of pregnancies. Each one, just before giving birth, is locked in a metal-barred cage, only inches bigger than her body. This is for over a month of being unable to walk, struggling to stand up

and lie down and preventing her from mothering her young properly. The Fur Trade has started again

P.E.T.A (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) have produced video at Fur's.Dead.com and with its international affiliates have accomplished a great deal including: The Co-Operative Bank is now refusing to invest in any business that is involved in factory farming, blood sports, or the fur trade of companies that test their products on animals.

Marcelle Williams