



JOHN·RAY·INITIATIVE

Connecting Environment, Science and Christianity

News and Ideas No 13, September 2006

Redefining prosperity

Editorial - David Thistlethwaite

Sixty years ago, much of Europe was starving. Today, we are over-fed, and much of the rest of the world starves. What are we to do with our affluence? Two JRI conferences this year held up a mirror to our prosperity. The Redcliffe conference showed that affluence is full of absurdities (like 'wealth' destroying the very world we are here to enjoy) and evils (impoverishing the already-poor). The Waste Conference showed that while we are all happy to see waste removed, no one wants it to arrive: and prosperity produces far too much. Over all this lies the shadow of global warming, the by-product of our lifestyle.

'Deconstructing prosperity' (as Alan Storkey put it at Redcliffe) requires cultural change as dramatic as post-war reconstruction. Realising it is painful at first. We do not wish to examine and change our lifestyles. But there are great benefits in doing so. Carbon-offsetting our cheap flights introduces us to projects (e.g. Climate Stewards) we would not have known. Practising eco-friendly energy introduces a fascinating new world of technology.

The focus of this newsletter is on 'action not words', as Sir John Houghton puts it. We have asked him to write about what we do, now that 'climate change' is mainstream. We also have two Waste conference speakers on putting words into practice, and a Redcliffe student on putting theology to work on a small holding. When we meet people who are doing things, it is always encouraging. The gospel works!

Forthcoming Events

December 14th, Westminster, London

JRI annual general meeting:

Nuclear Power: is it necessary?

Achieving carbon-free electricity generation

Can Renewables do the job?

with Professor John Twidell, and John Bond

January 20th 2007, Gloucester

Joint Redcliffe College/JRI day

Population and Biodiversity

Too many Stewards, not enough Creation?

With Professor John Guillebaud, Dr Andrew Gosler, and John McKeown



Sir John Houghton, JRI Chairman, receiving the 2006 Japan Prize

Global warming needs action not just words

John Houghton

On Sunday the 13th August, BBC Radio 4 polled listeners asking them to name the greatest threat to the world in the 21st century – chosen from International Terrorism, HIV/AIDS, Poverty and Climate Change. Climate Change came top of the poll – surprisingly, I thought, as some of the other threats appear more immediate. But it shows that at last the public are taking on board the enormous scale of the threat of climate change.

As scientists investigate further the likely impacts of climate change, the messages are getting stronger. For instance, a recent study¹ at the Hadley Centre in Exeter into the likely incidence of drought in future decades has concluded as follows. During the period 1980-2000, on average, the most extreme droughts (defined under a precise formula) affected about 1% of the world's land area at any one time. The figure is now approximately 2%. By 2050 such droughts are projected to affect about 10% and by 2100 about 30% of the world's land area, with devastating impacts especially on the populations of many of the world's poorest countries.

There are encouraging signs that politicians are beginning to recognize the urgency of the issue. For instance, in the United States, Governor Schwarzenegger of California (with an economy ranking as about seventh if listed with national economies) met recently in Los Angeles with Prime Minister Tony Blair, ex President Bill Clinton and a number of top industrialists from both sides of the Atlantic. They called for aggressive targets to be set and strong action to be taken to reduce greenhouse gases. What is urgently needed

is for governments to turn their fine words into effective action, by setting policy frameworks with clear targets and appropriate fiscal and market incentives within which industry and all of us can work with confidence.

Christians too are rising to the challenge. In February 2006, ninety evangelical leaders published a statement (www.christiansandclimate.org) calling on all Christians, in exercising their God-given responsibility to be stewards of creation, to recognize climate change as a most urgent Christian issue.

We, in the developed countries have already benefited over many generations from abundant fossil fuel energy. The demands on our stewardship take on a special poignancy as we realize that the adverse impacts of climate change will fall disproportionately on poorer nations and will tend to exacerbate the increasingly large divide between rich and poor. Our failure to be good stewards is a failure to love God and a failure to love our neighbours, especially our poorer neighbours in Africa and Asia. The moral imperative on us in rich countries is inescapable. For us to refuse to take action until China and India act as well is morally unacceptable.

Our attitude to the working out of the imperative should be positive not negative. We all know that giving is better than consuming and getting. To become sustainable on a global scale means much greater responsibility and efficiency in the use of resources. It also includes a much greater willingness to share with poorer communities so that they can have the benefits of clean water and cheap energy. Facing together the common threat could lead to the nations working much more closely together. Unique and pressing opportunities exist for Christian communities and individuals to lead the way in what is required².

I have recently been reviewing a book that is about to be published, 'Heat' by George Monbiot. It is an excellent book that lays out a detailed agenda for change especially in the energy sector. He closes the book by pointing out how, so often, fine words substitute for action especially because most of us are so resistant, even fearful, of the changes required. 'Governments', he suggests 'know that inside their electors there is a small but insistent voice asking them both to try and to fail'. He asks us all to recognise that 'in fighting climate change we must fight not only the oil companies, the airlines and the governments of the rich world, we must also fight ourselves'.

¹ E.J.Burke, S.J.Brown, N.Christidis 'Modeling the recent evolution of global drought and projections for the 21st century with the Hadley Centre climate model', Journal of Hydrometeorology, In Press

² See for example 'For Tomorrow Too' a leaflet published by TearFund

“ The reason people sit on their hands and do nothing is not for lack of knowledge or information; it's for lack of a will to respond. Man is fallen and seeks his own selfish way. We've failed as a nation and a religious people to care enough to alter our materialistic lifestyles or voting habits. This is a moral failure not a technical failure. More knowledge will not solve this problem (though more intelligence might help us solve problems that we already are willing to tackle). ”

Richard Cizik, National Association of Evangelicals (U.S.)

Redcliffe reflections

The 2006 joint JRI Redcliffe College conference brought together Christians from mission, economics, relief and business to discuss the impact of 'prosperity' on the global neighbourhood.

Jonathan Ingleby began by putting 'progress' in context, as a runaway train that has no respect for resources limits or justice. There needs to be an alternative model, and Christians should be the first to understand that ever-increasing consumption is not the goal of human life. Next, Alan Storkey 'deconstructed prosperity', and showed us some of the myths on which economics is based. 'Growth', for example, is not a good measurement of well-being, as we might spend more but live in a more congested, polluted environment. Many of our 'goods' (like unhealthy quantities of over-travelled food, which 'add' to GNP), are in fact 'bads'. Christians, he said, have to be much firmer ('bloody-minded') in their resistance to social trends that are deeply opposed to the gospel, and not be afraid of collective action.

Paul Cook, from Tear Fund, told us that the evidence of global warming is plain to see in Africa - but it is our pollution that has caused their droughts, and the terrible suffering they bring. This is why the directors of Tear Fund have thrown the charity's weight behind efforts to mitigate climate change. John Henry Lonie, speaking on 'Can business be green?', showed that the international business world is intensely aware of the need to be seen as environmentally responsible, not least because share prices can depend on it. Of course, being genuinely green is not the only approach adopted.... and he gave examples of the fierce controversy surrounding the practices of a Coca Cola bottling plant in India, where over-extraction of water and pollution of farmland had been reported. But many companies are concerned with the reality as well as the appearance, and it is an exciting time to be in the business of transforming both habits and technologies.

Papers, Presentations and full reports of the Redcliffe and Waste conferences are on the JRI website (www.jri.org.uk, see under 'Events')

Redeeming Waste

'End of Life?', (February, Cheltenham) was probably the first Christian conference on waste. It included an art exhibition 'Beauty for Ashes', theological reflections on waste, some insights by an MP into waste politics, and expert help from Scottish, Polish and English Christian waste experts.



'Evocative of the value of life and its destruction', Owl by Kate Standen, (bronze from roadkill), from Beauty for Ashes Waste Conference art show

Four striking conclusions from the day were: 1) waste is what we choose to discard; hence it is not an absolute, but culturally defined, and even a spiritual indicator, 2) excessive, and toxic, waste is the signature of consumerism, 3) waste need not be wasted; as well as recycling, there is energy recovery, nonetheless 4) we must seriously reduce.

Views from Poland and Sri Lanka

After the Waste Conference, we asked our Polish speaker, Magdalena Rybaczewska-Blazejowska, to express the impact of the day on her:

All Christians can stop (slow down) a process of environment destruction if they only join their forces. 'Ecumenical co-operation' towards environmental protection, a sustainable lifestyle and waste prevention, is no longer a meaningless term for me. According to my new point of view, ecumenism, which is associated with promoting unity among Christian churches through greater cooperation and improved understanding, has gained a new dimension. This is the dimension of cooperation towards saving the environment. And joining the forces to conserve the beauty of nature seems to be a very 'tempting' challenge.

My greatest discovery from the conference is that of extending the New Testament's call to help our neighbours. Neighbours are not only the people that live in 'my back yard' but also people overseas, and the natural environment they live in. Few people realise, however, that by destroying the environment we ruin people themselves. Moreover, very often it is the poorest who lose most.

I was left with a number of open questions. Do I try enough to live sustainably? What is my responsibility, as an individual, for the environment? What is my response to growing consumerism in Polish society, and the related increasing waste production? Am I able to resign from comforts just to make others' lives better? Am I prepared to change my lifestyle? Finally, are there any 'environmental' limits to growth?

Being just about to leave the conference deeply depressed that nothing much can be changed, I was bombarded (from Sir John Houghton's impromptu talk) with the message of 'hope'. 'Hope' that the degradation of the environment is not an inevitable process. 'Hope' that there is still time to solve the arising environmental problems. 'Hope' that there are people who want to participate actively in this difficult task. 'Hope' that I am not forlorn in my endeavours. 'Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love.' (1 Corinthians 13,13)

My opinion matters! My decision matters! My life matters! The early post-conference enthusiasms??? Having Christian roots, I am strongly convinced of my responsibility to make the better world to live in for the current and future generations. This strong belief I have taken away back home. I would like to express my gratitude to JRI for the invitation. It was a pleasure to be a member of the conference forum.



'Dragon' at Krakow's 3rd Festival of Recycling – May 2005



Simon Penney (pictured here) was also a speaker at the Waste Conference, and we asked him to report on his Waste work in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a beautiful island, with fantastic beaches, jungles, mountains, rivers and waterfalls, in many ways an Eden. However due largely to the influences of globalisation solid waste has become a major problem. This has been exacerbated by the growth in the island's economy. Whilst this delivers more consumer goods, cars, kitchens, etc, it also delivers a lot more waste into an infrastructure that at best can be described as dilapidated. This is even true in the war torn eastern part of the island where I have been working.

During the last three months, I have been working as a wastes and environmental management consultant for the Japanese Government in Sri Lanka. I helped the council of the eastern town of Kalmunai to develop a strategy for managing solid waste and tsunami debris. I also carried out an environmental assessment of some of the other development projects that the Japanese Government is sponsoring.

All three major people groups on the island, the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities are among the nicest and most courteous people that you could meet, however the relationships between these communities are once again tense. Even after 20 years of civil war and 60,000 deaths, it seems, sadly that the island is again sliding back into Civil war. Even during our time there, there were a number of suicide bombings in the capital Colombo.

Whilst there I was able to briefly meet with Damitha Rajapakse, director of the JRI sponsored project conserving medicinal plants. For the second part of my time in Sri Lanka my family were able to join me and had a great time, riding elephants, finding snakes and spiders and other parts of Gods good creation! We hope to return to Sri Lanka before too long. Please pray for this island as it struggles with itself. If you would like to find out more, or would be interested in more specific involvement in or with Sri Lanka, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address below.

Simon is a JRI Associate and is completing his Masters Degree in Global Issues in Contemporary Mission at Redcliffe College. His company, Promise Consulting (www.promiseconsulting.org.uk), provides charitable advice to mission, relief and development agencies.

Theology on an acre plot

Pamela Dowling, a student at Redcliffe College and a regular at JRI conferences, combines working a smallholding and study for a degree. We asked her about how the two worked together.

You bought your acre smallholding in the Forest of Dean three years ago. What difference has a year at Redcliffe made?

Well, I haven't looked after my garden very well! And I was surprised that we still had a good harvest!

Since going to college I've had to change my lifestyle dramatically. There's no point talking about the importance of the environment if you don't act accordingly in your own life. I'm constantly challenged by the practical demands of modern day living, versus environmentally friendly ideals. For example, living in the countryside I would find life incredibly hard without a car – buses are just too infrequent. But for every gallon of fuel I use, I'm releasing 5lb of carbon into the atmosphere. Luckily my husband has been spending some time in the garden shed and he's knocked together a bio-diesel processor, which runs off waste chip oil.

What about food shopping?

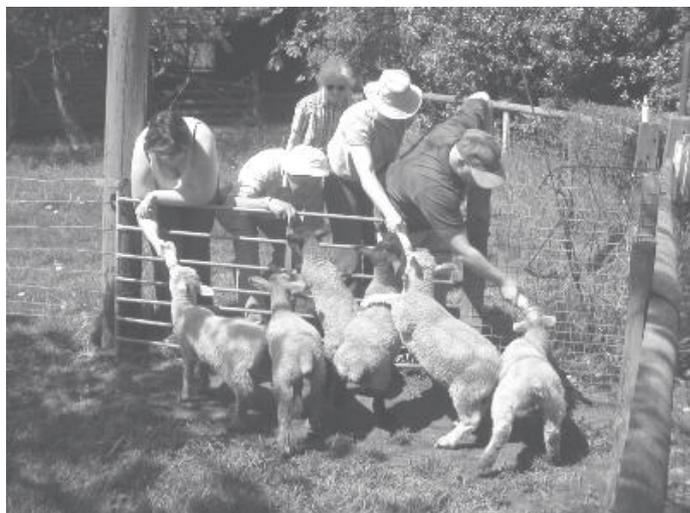
Nutritionally, the quicker the food reaches your plate from harvest the better, so the supermarket culture of much-travelled food actually works against us. I have cut down on supermarket visits, and get a weekly box of vegetables delivered. This leaves more time for pastoral visits. Also, my waste bin has diminished by a third. Incidentally, the older generation has never given up healthy living, and still shop daily at the village store, buying the best of what's available, and only what they need for the day. Local people buying local produce – that's excellent.

How else has Redcliffe challenged you?

Until I met overseas students, I never realised how much we were eating! Some of them were amazed we got fed three meals a day; they expected only one good meal a day for their needs. We take so much for granted. That's encouraged us to open ourselves up to our community: for example, we have joined Glos Nightstop to help teenagers who need emergency accommodation. We have also become a host farm for Willing Workers on Organic Farms, and are amazed by the impact of sharing our way of life. People are drawn to spending more time here.

And what have you learnt theologically?

Smallholding is hard work, and I have learnt from the Bible that work is no bad thing. In the Creation, God worked hard, and in general, work does you good! Our whole culture is directed to being 'labour-saving', but very often the real blessing of effort is missed. I don't mean pointless effort. I mean trying to live in harmony with God's creation, which actually frees us up, and gives us more time to help each other.



CRES course: ordinands feeding lambs

CRES inside & outside

The last few months have been busy times for both the staff and the students on the Certificate in Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (CRES). In May three of the CRES staff team were involved in a week long Rural Pastoral Studies week for eight ordinands at Ripon College, Cuddesdon. It was a great week with beautiful weather, which was excellent for the field trip days. CRES staff, students and friends all met up in the middle of June at Elm Farm near Keynsham. We had another superb day looking at the environmental schemes around the farm in the morning with talks, discussion and a short service in the afternoon. Meanwhile our second year students have all been hard at work on their dissertations, and we expect five to graduate in September at our annual residential at Offa House. There are several new initiatives under way. We were able to use one of the CRES modules as the basis for a sabbatical study leave for a Church Mission Society (CMS) worker from Bangladesh. We have planned two day conferences at Sarum College in Salisbury: a Rural Day on the 16th October, 2006; and an Environment Day on 24th March 2007 (for details see JRI web site or www.sarum.ac.uk). We are developing new modules for the course, and are looking to broaden the course out, maybe even to other countries beyond the UK. I write this just before setting off for Prague, where I will be speaking about the course to a an international group of theologians and others interested in environmental theology. It is certainly all go for CRES!

If you would like to join the CRES community, details and an application form can be found at www.cres.org.uk or email secretary@cres.org.uk

Dr. Martin Hodson (Principal Tutor, CRES)

The John Ray Initiative
Room QW212, Francis Close Hall
University of Gloucestershire
Swindon Road,
Cheltenham,
GL50 4AZ
Telephone 01242 714821
Email admin@jri.org.uk
www.jri.org.uk