
THE JOHN RAY INITIATIVE

promoting environmental sustainability

Summer 2002 - Newsletter No.8

Forum 2002

It is almost commonplace to say that the world has changed since 11th September 2001. We have all been brought up with a jolt and reminded of our vulnerability. There is a greater sense of global interdependence and of the need for concerted action against threats such as international terrorism. Inequities and contrasts between East and West, North and South have been emphasised. However, global environmental issues have been somewhat eclipsed by other threats.

This has been especially true in the U.S.A. where many have not faced up to environmental issues, such as climate change. Their intransigence has, however, provided impetus to the rest of the world to agree to the Kyoto Protocol, with the expectation that it will be ratified by the time of the Summit in Johannesburg in September or soon afterwards.

John Houghton assisted a group meeting in Geneva to prepare a Statement by the World Council of Churches to present to that Summit pointing out the equity issues (international and intergenerational) and the Christian principles that need to be applied.

FORUM 2002 was a conference organised jointly with the Au Sable Institute (USA) and held at St Anne's College, Oxford, 14-17 July. It informed Christian leaders and policymakers, especially from the United States, about the scientific and theological implications of climate change and its impacts on human communities. The action needed, especially by the Christian community was debated and a conference statement agreed and publicised after the conference. This and other papers from the event are available online at: <http://www.http://www.climateforum2002.org/>

The impressive list of speakers included the Rt Hon John Gummer, former Secretary of State for the Environment, and the Rt Rev'd James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool.

Preparing for the 'World Summit on Sustainable Development'

As Governments and voluntary organisations prepare for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (26th August to 4th September) churches across Britain and Ireland are

called to prepare for the event with prayer and action. Four Christian environmental organisations (A Rocha UK, Christian Ecology Link, Eco-Congregation and JRI), in association with the Environmental Issues Network (EIN) of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), prepared briefing materials for churches, including a 'Creation Care' prayer for use on August 25th, the Sunday prior to the Summit. These are available online at: <http://www.churchesearthsummit.org.uk/>



Agriculture and theology

In April 2001, JRI became the third partner, with the Agricultural Christian Fellowship and the Church Mission Society, in the 'Agriculture and Theology Project'. In this context, we investigated the FMD epidemic and the wider farming crisis, had several opportunities to communicate our insights, at conferences, workshops and other contexts, and sought to influence policy thinking, for example, through submissions to the Curry Commission and work with the Churches' Rural Group. The project has just launched its own website, at www.agriculture-theology.org.uk.

English bishops' conference

There are increasing signs that Christian churches are beginning to take 'care for creation' more seriously. In June 2001, the English Bishops spent one day of their two day conference in Liverpool addressing the question of Christian concern for environmental issues. Sir John Houghton was privileged to address the meeting and take part in the discussion which has certainly served to heighten awareness in the churches.

Conservation training in Myanmar

John Sale (Executive Secretary of JRI) was in Myanmar (Burma) during March and April. In addition to his regular supervision of several Ph.D research projects in conservation biology at Yangon University, John was awarded a fellowship

from the International Tropical Timber Organisation to design a new interdisciplinary M.Sc programme in Conservation Biology and Management. This 2-year course will provide professional training for people from a variety of biological backgrounds seeking a career related to the conservation of Myanmar's unusually rich biodiversity, including ecological research and managing protected areas, or special programmes for the rehabilitation of highly endangered species, such as the tiger or the Irrawaddy Dolphin.

There was an enthusiastic response to John's proposals from both academics and conservation practitioners in departments such as Forestry. With the beginnings of movement toward a more democratic form of government, it is hoped that international funding to set up the course will be forthcoming and that it will result in much needed strengthening of the overall conservation effort in Myanmar, one of the world's poorest nations.

JRI in action – some highlights

2001

May 23-25. JRI directors spoke at Ridley Hall's conference 'Business & sustainable development'.

August 27. Peter Carruthers spoke on 'Farming, foot-and-mouth and the finger of God' to an audience of over a hundred at Greenbelt. There was a joint stall with *A Rocha* throughout the festival.

October 13. Peter Carruthers led a workshop on the farming crisis at the CEL conference 'Christianity, Food and Land Use'. A report by JRI Associate Robert Williams is on the JRI website.

December 11. Directors, Advisors and guests gathered for JRI's AGM in London, which was addressed by Margaret Killingray of London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, and David Pickering of EcoCongregation, as well as John Houghton and Peter Carruthers.

2002

January 30. JRI Associate Adrian Thompson compiled a *Stewards of Creation* service used in chapel of St Martin's College, Lancaster.

March 21. Annual John Ray Lecture hosted jointly with University of Gloucestershire Chaplaincy. Peter Carruthers spoke on 'Farming in crisis: the view from above'.

March/April. At all six weeks of **Spring Harvest** this year, JRI directors gave seminars on 'The environment: red herring or hot potato?'. The question of how to handle this 'hot potato' was of such interest that about 400 people turned up to seminars led by Sam Berry (GM129), Peter

Carruthers (WA76), Claire Ashton (CM116), Bob Carling (CS115) and Colin Russell. Tapes of the talks are available at £3.50 (plus £1.00 p&p for up to 3 tapes) from ICC, Silverdale Road, Eastbourne, BN20 7AB (orders@iccsreadingtheword.com or Tel. 084 5607 1672) quoting the tape reference numbers given above in brackets.

April 12-14. Joint JRI/St George's House, Windsor Castle consultation on 'Environmental decision-making in a technological age'. Papers were given by Mark Moody-Stuart (ex-Chairman of Shell), David Atkinson (Scottish Agricultural College), Celia Deane-Drummond (Chester College), Sir John Houghton, Sam Berry and Peter Carruthers.

May 21. Sam Berry gave the Dolling Lecture in Portsmouth on 'Environmental Justice'.

July 7. Sir John Houghton speaking at CEL conference in Sheffield. "While Stocks Last, Christians, Consumerism and Creation".

August 23-26. Greenbelt. A joint stall by A Rocha, CEL and JRI to focus on Earth Summit (WSSD).

Colin Russell has written "Where science and history meet: some fresh challenges to the Christian faith?", *Faith & Thought Bulletin*, 2001, no. 29, pp.7-20; also in *Science and Christian Belief*, 2001, 13, 113-125.

New briefing papers

After Kyoto by Sir John Houghton (online only).

The Bible and the Environment by Professor Gordon Wenham (online only).

Environmental Stewardship: a consultation held at St. George's House, Windsor, September 2000. Report by Dr Pete Moore.

Renewable Energy by Professor John Twidell.

Sustainable consumption - Visionary or Illusory? by Dr Pete Moore with thanks to Sir Brian Heap.

Whale and Dolphin Conservation by Dr Ray Gambell.

Some future events

2002 November 21. JRI Annual General Meeting. St Paul's, Robert Adam Street (near Baker Street) London. AGM 12.00, lunch 13.00, presentations and discussions on 'globalisation' until 16.00.

2003 February 8. Day conference in Cheltenham organised with the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Gloucestershire, entitled 'Jesus and the earth - the Gospel and the environmental crisis'. Speakers include the Rt Rev'd James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool and the Rev'd Dr Michael Northcott, University of Edinburgh. Contact us for more details.

Farming matters

Foot-and-mouth disease

The 2001 foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) epidemic ran for more than seven months, resulting in the slaughter of more than six million livestock on nearly 10,000 farms (c. 5% of all UK farms). Control measures impacted much more widely, affecting nearly all livestock businesses and bringing some into severe financial crisis. Hardest hit were smaller family farms, many already in financial difficulties¹. Many other businesses were affected, most notably tourism.

Farming in crisis

FMD came hard on the heels of a series of other crises - flooding, classical swine fever and BSE - as well as the pervasive decline in farming's fortunes. At present, about 20,000 jobs are lost from agriculture each year. In 2001, UK agriculture employed 2% of the workforce and contributed 0.7% Gross Value Added to the national economy. In 2000 (pre-FMD), farming's total income, at £1.88 billion, was at its lowest level in 25 years (income per head was £7,800). In contrast, public expenditure for 2001 is forecast at £4.75 billion.

Many of agriculture's environmental impacts, such as the removal of hedgerows and the decline in farmland birds, are well known. Some negative effects seem to be slowing, but farming's burden on the environment remains considerable. One estimate put the 1996 costs of UK agriculture's environmental and health impacts at £2.34 billion².

UK farming provides 62% of the nation's food, a way of life for some and a place to recreate for many. It provides jobs up- and down-stream and the basis of a burgeoning rural tourist industry (a fact made very clear during the FMD epidemic). In particular, farming has shaped, and manages, most of our land. Farmland is the main context in which many experience God's creation.

Caring in crisis

Farmers worldwide have become victims of forces way beyond their control, and many have gone under. Part of our Christian calling is to care for the casualties, and it is very encouraging that churches and Christian organisations (such as Farm Crisis Network) were out front in helping those whose lives were devastated by the FMD epidemic.

Understanding the causes

It is also part of our calling to understand causes behind symptoms, and, if necessary, to speak out 'prophetically'. Measured against the standards of love of neighbour and care of creation, the world farming and food system is found wanting.

The majority of the animals slaughtered to control FMD were probably not infected, and none was killed for food. The pyres were a potent symbol of the reduction of livestock to commodities to be used and disposed of at will. This may not reflect the attitude or practice of individual farmers, but it is characteristic of a system.

Control of the world food system is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few large corporations, leaving producers powerless and, often, the environment wasted. Unrestrained market forces are not compatible with care for the poor and stewardship of the earth.

Biblical correctives

The Bible does not proscribe economic growth, but it does prescribe measures to limit it at the costs of injustice, oppression, of ill-treatment of domestic livestock and over-exploitation of the land. This principle of restraint, on the use of land, livestock and labour, on the concentration of wealth, and on expansionism, can be discerned in many Biblical themes and writings, but is most forcefully conveyed through the sabbath.

The sabbath day was a day of rest for people *and* livestock (Exodus 20:8-11), and anticipated the sabbath year (a year for freeing slaves (Ex.21:1-11), cancelling debts (Deut.15:1-11) and resting the land (Leviticus 25:1-7)), and the Jubilee (Lev.25:8-55), a sabbath of sabbaths, in which 'each was to return to his property and each to his family', thus strictly limiting the growth of private wealth.

The sabbath places a radical constraint on relentless production (and consumption) and protects those without a voice and without power - the poor, livestock and the land. The sabbath reminds us that the land is a gift, that the earth and everything in it are not ours to do with what we will, but the Lord's. The sabbath affirms that 'I am, indeed, my brother's keeper'!

What can we do?

This is always the hardest question! The first thing is to pray - to take seriously the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14. Those with influence can call for ethical approaches to policy making, that reflect the values set out above. All can seek to practise good stewardship of the earth and love of our neighbour in what we buy and eat. All of us can find ways to 'keep the sabbath'.

Peter Carruthers

¹ See Carruthers, S P. 2002. *Farming families in crisis*. RABI, ARC-Addington Fund, FCN and RSIN

² See Pretty, J, N; Brett, C; Gee, D; Hine, R E; Mason, C F; Morison, J I L; Raven, H; Rayment, M & van der Bijl, G. 2000. An assessment of the external costs of UK agriculture. *Agricultural Systems*, **65** (2), 113-136.

Associates working together



JRI Associates met on 22 September 2001. Discussion included: opportunities to work on 'projects' as part of a small team, such as speaking to local churches; refining a questionnaire about participants' 'ecological footprint', helping develop a 'road show' visual presentation, and taking a mobile display to different venues.

Professor John Twidell, speaking on 'Renewable Energy', said that he is often asked what we can do practically. He gave some 'instant' suggestions. 1) Change our light bulbs for low energy ones - a cheap supplier is IKEA; 2) choose an electricity supplier that buys 'green energy' - which will cost 15% more; 3) monitor our electricity meters (just doing so tends to bring savings of at least 10%); and 4) when replacing 'White goods', make sure they are in the top category of energy efficiency.

John recounted the difficulty of finding out which washing machines, dishwashers, driers and fridges are efficient, and described a four hour visit to John Lewis' examining documentation (giving an impromptu tutorial to staff and shoppers at the same time!) before ordering the most energy-saving (German) products.

Dena Burne led a group from her church to the Whitefield Institute to hear Professor Richard Bauckham (JRI Advisor) on "How to read the Bible Ecologically". Her report is on JRI's website.

Advisory Council

This new group provides specialist advice to the Board, and facilitates liaison with other groups.

Professor Richard Bauckham, Professor of New Testament Studies, University of St Andrews

Revd David Bookless, Director, A Rocha UK

Dr Bob Carling, Publishing Consultant

Shan Dobinson, Director, Trinity Training

Christopher Jones, Farmer

Revd Dr Ernest Lucas, Vice-Principal, Bristol Baptist College

Dr Peter Moore, Science writer

Revd Dr David Pickering, Executive Director, Eco-Congregation

Dr Peter Thomas, Plant Biologist, Keele University

Professor John Twidell, Director of the AMSET Centre for Renewable Energy

Revd Dr David Wilkinson FRAS, Assoc. Director of the Centre for Christian Communication

Memorable quotation

"... in his love of nature, and in his careful observation of all her agencies and processes, Livingstone, in his last journeys, was the same as ever. He looked reverently on all plants and animals, and on the solid earth in all its aspects and forms, as the creatures of that same God whose love in Christ it was his heart's delight to proclaim. His whole life ... was ruled by the conviction that the God of nature and the God of revelation were one." From *The Life of David Livingstone* by W.G. Blaikie (London: John Murray, 1880).

And finally....

Please tell us if you have an email address, or if you no longer want to receive JRI mailings. And thank you for your continued prayers for our work.

With best wishes,

John Houghton
Chairman, The John Ray Initiative

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