



# JOHN·RAY·INITIATIVE

Connecting Environment, Science and Christianity

*News and Ideas*

No 23 June 2010

*Editorial— Dr. Martin Hodson*

Quite a lot has happened in the months since our last newsletter. For a start we welcome a new Chair for the JRI Board, the Revd. Dr. John Weaver. John tells us something of his vision for JRI in the next few years. We also had a very successful “Food Futures” conference at Redcliffe College in March, and we report on that. JRI has also been re-vamping its associates scheme, and we have welcomed several new associates in the last few months. Paul Houghton brings us important news about the JRI Prayer Update. Our distance learning course, Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (CRES) is going from strength to strength, with two new modules soon becoming available. Do come on our field trip this summer! And of course climate change is never far from our thoughts, and we are gathering our thoughts for the COP16 conference in Mexico later this year.



*John Weaver on a recent visit to Nepal, where the glaciers are melting at an alarming rate due to climate change.*

## **Making Connections**

As the newly elected chair of the JRI Board, I am grateful to those who have put this trust in me. I feel that it is a great privilege and opportunity to serve in this way. To follow in the footsteps of Sir John Houghton, Ian Arbon and Prof Bob White would be terrifying but for their personal encouragement and gentle humility.

How do I see the future for JRI and what do I feel are the ways in which we should be expressing our aims and purpose are key questions for me at this

time. Or we might take the ‘strap-line’: ‘Connecting Environment, Science and Christianity’ and ask how and why do we do this?

We can respond to the *zeitgeist* – the spirit of the age manifest positively in sustainability, carbon trading, carbon off-setting, ecological and environmental concern, and negatively in climate denial and climate skepticism.

To quote Mordecai’s words to Esther: “And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). I believe that JRI is here for such a time as this. JRI is uniquely placed, and we have through our associates the expertise and networks to address the vital issues raised by the spirit of our age.

*Resources:*

We have some excellent resources: CRES, the Agriculture and Theology Project (ATP), periodic conferences, briefing papers, and ‘coming soon’ – *Updates* - look out for these. The first one will be a reflection on the shape of the new Parliament and the effect of its likely emphases on the developing world and in addressing climate change.

To these resources we add all the work with which our Associates are involved, and our focus on prayer, in which we share with Brendan Bowles of Climate Stewards.

Log on to the JRI website for up-to-date information. If you are an Associate reading this, write and tell us what you are doing, what you are passionate about, and what we can do to support you in your work.

*What we can do:*

We can provide relevant and up-to-the minute information through our publications.

We can influence through lobbying and discussions with local and national government.

We can make space for debate through conferences and our interactive website.

*What we still need:*

More Associates

More active support

More financial support

JRI – ‘connecting environment, science and Christianity’ – but it is people who make connections. We make the connections in our studies and workplaces,

we make connections in our research and through our writing, and most of all we make connections through the people we meet and with whom we talk. Let JRI help you to keep making connections and to keep on connecting environment, science and Christianity.

**John Weaver**



## Food Futures day

Once again our annual meeting at Redcliffe College in Gloucester was a highly successful event with over 70 people present. Andy Kingston-Smith, lecturer at Redcliffe College introduced the day, and JRI Director, Margot Hodson, chaired it. Here we give brief summaries of the talks given by the main speakers and of our Coffee house session.

**Mike Rayner** (Department of Public Health, University of Oxford)

Mike was our first speaker, whose topic was, “What the Bible says about food.” He asked us to see food in a new light. We often take food for granted, but the Bible can help us see food in a new way. We need to change the way we act and how we eat and produce food.

Why is food important? It is essential for life, and is a pleasure. Sharing and eating food cements relationships. The invention of cooking distinguishes us from other animals. Cultures are defined by cuisines as well as languages. Religions have feasts and special foods, and for Christians food is important in the Eucharist. There are many ethical decisions to be made on food, particularly on the way it is produced and traded. Christians need to be humble on food ethics. Food is also the cause of crises. Food price increases are triggered by the global economic situation. We have a billion hungry people while many are obese.

Food is found in the Bible in the first and last chapters (Gen 1 v29 and Rev 22 v2). Many references are symbolic (e.g. Adam and Eve). The Eucharist is also symbolic and it matters that bread and wine are used. In the early part of Genesis we see human behaviour as it should be. Mike translated Adam to mean “compost”! His job was stewardship, not to exploit but to conserve creation. Initially the primary task was gathering of plant based foods. Farming became essential after the expulsion from Eden. Then we had the murder of Abel by Cain, and Cain the farmer builds the first city. Justice is a major theme of the Bible, and many stories relate to food and in-

justice to the poor (e.g. Amos). Injustice is linked to environmental catastrophe, and this is still the case; global warming hurts the poor more. Respect for animals was an important aspect, and the Jewish food laws are deserving of study. Most apply to meat. Are we omnivores? Mike does not advocate vegetarianism but cutting down on meat and eating it more reverently. He believes that we should eat meat but less of it to help save the planet. The eating of food is necessary and is a pleasure. In John’s gospel two of the seven miracles concern food. God is the ultimate source of food, and this should lead to gratitude. In the wilderness Israel was taught not to be greedy over food. Food can and should be enjoyable. Jesus was accused of being drunkard and glutton. At the wedding feast at Cana Jesus produced better wine and lots of it.

Food cannot be enjoyed out of its moral context, and Mike produced two types of food for participants to eat to illustrate this. Easy Cheese comes in a can. It cannot be bought in the UK but in the US. Its relationship to real cheese is doubtful, and it represents the reduction of food to its chemicals. This is nutritionally bad and not in the Bible! Mike also made a fruitcake for us as a gift, to the same recipe as he cooked for the baptisms of his daughters. It was delicious. There are five references to cake in the Bible. Comparing the two foods Mike said we should pay more attention to food taste and where it comes from. As we did at Redcliffe, food is to be shared. The Eucharist is about physical food, and is an act of remembrance. At its heart there is real food, reminding us of the incarnation. Ideally we should use real bread and from nearby, not from far away and mechanised.

The Earth’s problems are all interrelated. We have thought that whatever we do to the Earth it will supply us, but this is not the case. We need to look for justice for the poor, correcting imbalances in food availability and stopping unfair trading practices.

## Coffee house

For the last few years students from Redcliffe College have given brief presentations relevant to the topic of the day. This year three students gave us talks on diverse subject areas.

*Nathan* from Uganda told a story from a man called Julius of a meal in Uganda in a time of food shortage. What should he do? Maybe he would have to stop fathering children. He knew people had died recently. Many families were having one meal a day. Droughts and floods made things worse. We need to do something.

*Edith* reflected on agriculture and missionary training. Africa Inland Mission (AIM) in Kenya are training Africans to be missionaries. This includes a course on dry land agriculture as it is very significant

in the arid lands of Africa. At the college students have a small garden. Mission is not only sharing the Gospel but is also practical. Training needs to be holistic, and must include environmental awareness. *Ibeela* from central Nigeria had experienced fluctuation in rainfall between 2006-9. Sometimes rains are late and there is drought, and sometimes too much and crops flooded. This has been a source of conflict. Action and prayer are needed.



The picture shows (l. to r.): Mike Rayner, Ruth Valerio, Margot Hodson (Chair), Patrick Mulvany and Andy Kingston-Smith (Redcliffe College)

**Patrick Mulvany** (Chair of UK Food Group)

“How will farmers, herders and fisherfolk do it?” was the title of Patrick’s presentation. He felt that agriculture was characterized by a number of disconnects, both in the developed and developing world. He sees disconnects between agriculture and the environment; between consumers and farmers or land and cities; and between policies and expectations. Patrick considered the question, “Who feeds us?” Most food is local not global. Most food is produced by farmers. The norm is local food production, and our system is the aberration. His next question was, “How many species had we eaten in the last week?” He said there were five big species (wheat, maize, palm oil, rice, soya) sold in supermarkets, so we concentrated on just a few species. But some eat 50 species or so in a week, and about 7-10 thousand plant species are eaten by people. Of these, however, very few dominate food systems. We have all our eggs in few baskets, and we need different varieties for different environments. Unfortunately breeds are being lost, biodiversity is being decreased and the future is bleak.

World agriculture has to be seen in the context of a number of factors: agricultural biodiversity; soils; water; climate change; agricultural development aid; and human population.

Patrick expanded a little on some of these factors. Trade in virtual water is vast and tends to be from

poorer drier places to richer humid places. Climate change could cause an increase of 3°C or more in the tropics this century. The contribution of agriculture to climate change is large: the food system 15-18%; land transformation 15-18%; and 10% from transport and other factors. The total contribution from agriculture alone is 30-50%. On human population the irony is that as population increases less are involved in agriculture. By 2050 we should reach 9 billion or so. Since 1985 the rate of increase is getting less. In the past 40 years we have fed the increased population, and we should be able to feed the next 40 years of increase.

To solve the above problems Patrick believes that we need better managed and more biodiverse agricultural systems. These are capable of a 30-100% yield increase. To illustrate this Patrick introduced us to three problems and their solutions:

1) In East African maize crops stemborer moths and the weed *Striga*, which weakens the roots, are important pests. The problem can be overcome by intercropping *Desmodium* between the maize rows. This releases chemicals that put off moths and controls *Striga*.

2) Drought in the Caribbean had led to successive harvest failures. By using rainwater harvesting technology, and drought tolerant varieties rapid results were achieved. In one year there was an engaged community, carbon in the soil was managed, and poverty alleviated.

3) In the UK Prof. Martin Woolf has shown the benefits of multi-cropping of varieties include increased productivity.

We need to aim at a low carbon, biodiverse, resilient ecological food provision, which can feed 9 billion people. It can be done.

Most government emphasis is on monoculture because it pays the rent. Power pushes us towards unsustainability. Now 67% of seed production is controlled by just 10 companies. Patrick then outlined moves towards food sovereignty. ‘Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.’

(Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007)

Patrick felt that food security was really how to control people through food.

The European Food Declaration was about to be launched, and this seeks to redress some of these problems. There is a sense of urgency as we need to rewrite the economic, political and social rules. We need to rewrite the rules to prevent the multinational companies from taking over. The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) suggested 22 ways of moving towards more agriecological sys-

tems. However, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has failed to implement any of the IAASTD recommendations after 4 years. Patrick ended by quoting Colin Tudge "Agriculture is NOT a business like any other- it beats the drum of biology." The PowerPoint slides for Patrick's presentation are now available at: <http://www.jri.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/PatrickMulvany2010.ppt>

**Ruth Valerio** (author of 'L is for Lifestyle') Ruth was our final speaker, and leads A Rocha UK's "Living Lightly" programme. Her topic was "Ethical Food." Ruth said there were many issues concerning food including: ownership; diet and health; animal welfare; high energy input; pesticides; climate change; agrifuels; waste; genetically modified organisms; and the IMF and economics.

But what is the right way to live? Ruth introduced us to seven key virtues:

1) *Humility* in every area of our lives. We do not have all the answers, and are finite. Technology may provide some answers, but not all. The opposite is pride.

2) *Frugality* is the opposite of our present culture, "because I'm worth it". Ruth cited as an example asparagus in winter. Do we really need this? We should recognise the Earth's limits. The opposite of frugality is wastefulness and greed.

3) *Generosity*. We can think everything is negative. Food is enjoyable. We should be celebrating the good things that God has given us, and always be thankful.

4) *Justice* is right at the core of the Biblical message. For humans and all inhabitants of this world. We need knowledge, and to become intelligent informed consumers. Is it fair??

5) *Courage*. Much goes against the flow of our culture and involves having the courage to re-write rules. Do you have to be a "Hippy"?

6) *Hope and Patience*. We need to make decisions reflecting the future. Patience is needed to keep going in the face of cynicism and despair. Ethical food is not a fad.

7) *Love* undergirds everything. We should be selfless and ask God to break us up. "One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds." (Aldo Leopold)

Having set the ethical framework Ruth then asked what are the right practical things to do? She felt we should reconnect with the food we eat, re-skill, and increase knowledge. We should eat food that is as unprocessed as possible, and support local food businesses by moving away from supermarkets. We should buy food from non-intensive schemes (organic/ Linking Environment and Farming

(LEAF) /free range), and when buying from abroad buy Fair Trade or Waitrose Foundation. Organisations such as the Soil Association and Food Matters need our support. Finally, Ruth was clear that we need to reduce the amount of meat and dairy that we consume. Quite a large reduction needed- twice a week at most.

## JRI Prayer Update

Over many years, the faithful prayer support of JRI Friends, Associates and many others who have links with JRI, has been of key importance as we seek God's leading in ongoing and future plans. We are indeed grateful.

As from June 2010 a monthly prayer update, focusing mainly on specific JRI issues, will replace the prayer forum currently linked to the JRI website. International climate and environmental concerns continue to be highlighted on the monthly Climate Prayers sent out by Brendan Bowles, Climate Stewards Director, A Rocha. It can be accessed on [www.climateprayer.net](http://www.climateprayer.net) The new JRI prayer update will be sent out by email to all on the prayer partners list. If you registered as a prayer partner in February 2009, you will automatically receive the update. If you did not register then but wish to join, please send your name and e-mail address to [admin@jri.org.uk](mailto:admin@jri.org.uk), quoting 'JRI Prayer Update'.

**Paul Houghton**

## Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (CRES)

If you have always wanted to find out how the Christian faith and environmental issues connect then our distance learning course, CRES, could be just for you! CRES is very much a key part of the JRI learning community. Although CRES starts and finishes in September each year the early Summer is the time when many people are looking for courses. CRES is now getting quite a few enquiries every week, and we recommend that students make their applications soon as this allows us to find a local tutor and give instructions on the course before it really gets going! If you are interested probably the best place to look first is the CRES web site <http://www.cres.org.uk/> If you have any queries about the course then email us at [admin@jri.org.uk](mailto:admin@jri.org.uk)

## The John Ray Initiative

Room QW212, Francis Close Campus  
University of Gloucestershire  
Swindon Road, Cheltenham, Glos., GL50 4AZ

[www.jri.org.uk](http://www.jri.org.uk)  
[admin@jri.org.uk](mailto:admin@jri.org.uk)  
01242 714821

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