



# JOHN RAY INITIATIVE

Newsletter – Number 32 – November 2016

It has been just over a year since our last Newsletter (September 2015). This does not reflect a lack of JRI activity, but is partly due to a realisation that most of JRI's communications nowadays are electronic. It also has the advantage that it saves us quite a lot of money and we cut down less trees! However, we felt that the time is now right to produce a newsletter, and to bring all of our many activities into one publication. The last year has been a momentous one in many ways for the environment, and JRI has kept up with the news the whole time. There have also been a number of important publications. We will look at all this later in this newsletter, but first news of our big annual conference for 2017.

*Dr Martin Hodson*

*JRI Operations Director*

## **Nature in the balance. Can we put a value on the environment, and should we?**

Our Annual Conference for 2017 will again be held in Bournville, Birmingham in collaboration with ForMission College. This year we will be in the dedicated conference facility at the College. The theme of our conference is, in many ways, foundational as the way we value nature determines what we do with it. So we will ask these questions: What is the value of non-human nature? Does it only have value if it is useful to humans? These are not just theoretical questions, but are really important when we look at the complete range of environmental issues.



In the early 2000s the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment popularized a concept known as Ecosystem Services, defined as ‘the benefits people obtain from ecosystems’. Four categories of services were included: supporting; provisioning; regulating; and cultural. The Ecosystem Services framework has become the dominant thinking in nature conservation, but is highly anthropocentric, focusing on value to humans. Moreover, it encourages attempts to put monetary value on various aspects of the environment, to incentivise conservation.

But are there other ways to protect nature? Does our environment have intrinsic value, and how is it valuable to God? In this conference we investigate different views on valuing nature. We will begin by carefully explaining the Ecosystem Services concept. We will then explore the theological and ethical implications of this idea, and whether other frameworks might be preferable. In our seminars we will explore some of the practical outworking of environmental ethics and theology in more detail. This conference will be of interest to Christians and others who have an interest

in nature conservation and the environment. It is intended to deepen our thinking as we respond to the present environmental crisis.

**The date of our conference will be Saturday 18th March 2017 from 9.30am to 4.30pm.**

Our keynote speakers are:



**Dr. Darren Evans** (left of picture) “Ecosystem Services: managing nature for human benefit.”

**Prof. Richard Bauckham** (centre) “Why do other creatures matter?”

**Rev. Dave Bookless** (right) “Biblical Wisdom for Nature Conservation.”



*Panel at the 2016 Conference*

We also have a wonderful line-up of seminars, and for more details see the ForMission Conference Page:

<http://formission.org.uk/events/list/>

The price for the day including full lunch and refreshments is £48, and bookings can now be made securely online via Eventbrite. We anticipate high demand for places and early booking is advisable. All of the details are available at:

<http://www.jri.org.uk/events/nature-in-the-balance/>

### **News from September 2015 to November 2016- the JRI take**

In our September 2015 newsletter we were expecting the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be agreed, and indeed they were. We had already decided to make the new SDGs the topic of our 2016 conference on Saturday 5th March and Our theme was ‘A Sustainable Future?’ and we explored the recently agreed United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our first speaker, Helen Dennis of Christian Aid, gave us an overview, then Dr Simon Stuart of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature focused in on the SDGs and biodiversity loss. After lunch Sheryl Haw of Micah Global encouraged and challenged us with a biblical and missiological view of the SDGs. Seminars were led by Ash Barker, Ian Brooks, Andrew Francis, Sheryl Haw and Bob Sluka, after which they joined with the main speakers for a question and answer panel session. Our thanks go to our conference partners ForMission, A Rocha UK and Micah Global, and to the events staff at Bournville College for hosting and providing for us. All the talks and resources are available on our conference webpage: <http://www.jri.org.uk/events/a-sustainable-future-jri-conference-5-march-2016/>

At the end of 2015 we had the crucial COP21 climate change meeting in Paris. JRI was very active during that time. As a result we produced five resources that come at the topic from a variety of angles:



- 1) Paris, Paris - COP21, a personal reflection and review. A special briefing by Dr. Martin Hodson.
- 2) Paris, Romans and the Dark Side of the Force. A theological reflection by Rev. Margot Hodson.
- 3) “Jam Tomorrow?”: Reflections on the COP21 Paris Conference. A theological reflection by Rev. Dr. John Weaver.
- 4) Climate Agreement requires priests and prophets. A report from Dr. Tjirk van der Ziel, who attended COP21.
- 5) JRI Twitter Feed concerning COP21. A Storify presentation of JRI activities in the run up to Paris and during the conference.

We have gathered all of these items on to one page: <http://www.jri.org.uk/events/jri-and-cop21/>

Then away from the international scene Eco Church was launched at St Paul's Cathedral on 26th January. The new eco award scheme for UK churches was developed by A Rocha UK with Tearfund and Christian Aid. Supported by major denominations including the Church of England, Methodist Church and Baptist Union, and various environmental organisations, Eco Church provides a free online survey for churches to measure their contribution to environmental care, and resources to assist with any issues raised. Points are awarded as the church answers questions on the use of buildings and land, worship and teaching, congregation lifestyles and concern for local and global environment, and these add to the reward of bronze, silver and gold awards. The Eco Church scheme replaces the Eco-congregation awards which were given to more than 300 churches during the 15 years it was running. Several JRI representatives were present at the launch.

Full details of the scheme are available from <http://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>



*The Launch of Eco-Church*

The next big date on the international scene which has major implications for the environment was 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016 and the result of the EU referendum. JRI, Chair, John Weaver, has kept a close eye on this, and blogged about it in July 2016. He has recently produced a fuller, updated account as a JRI Briefing paper, ***European Environmental Policy: Post Brexit what should we do?*** available as pdf and ebook downloads from <http://www.jri.org.uk/briefings>



*Shutterstock Image, Brexit flag ID:417868516  
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As we are putting this Newsletter together we are aware that the result of the presidential election in the United States is likely to have a major impact on environmental policy. The election of Donald Trump has been a shock to many of us and will have implications for the environment in many areas. I am sure that we will be reflecting in more detail on this in the coming weeks and months, but what are the key issues? The item on everyone's mind is the Paris climate change agreement which entered force recently. The United States has signed up to the agreement and Trump has said that he would like to withdraw from it. It will not be easy to disengage, however, and it could take several years. Trump, a climate sceptic, is very likely to try to dismantle Obama's internal energy policies. He could well approve the Keystone XL pipeline, for

example. Trump is also unlikely to favour renewable energy production. If there is a bright spot it is that Trump's climate scepticism did not appear to stop him wanting to build a wall to protect one of his golf courses from sea level rise. So maybe, deep down, there is a pragmatic streak there, and maybe even a suggestion that he takes science more seriously than his public speeches might suggest. But perhaps I am being a bit too hopeful? Whatever, those of us who care about God's creation have a lot to pray about.

Meanwhile going on in the background to all of the above we have seen unprecedented global warming where 2015 broke the record set by 2014, and it looks highly likely that 2016 will be even warmer. And yet at the same time renewable energy is advancing very quickly around the world, with one major exception being the United Kingdom. But on biodiversity there was more bad news recently when World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) released the Living Planet Report 2016. They reported that between 1970 and 2012 populations of vertebrate animals had decreased in abundance by 58%. It is not just climate change that we need to be considering.

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- The JRI website will be ▪
- undergoing a facelift in 2017 ▪
- - to make it more 'responsive' to ▪
- mobile and tablet screen ▪
- requirements, & ▪
- - to make it easier to locate and ▪
- download resources ▪
- 
- Do look out for news of this ▪
- update and take a look – we hope ▪
- you will like it! ▪
- 
- [www.jri.org.uk](http://www.jri.org.uk) ▪
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## Social Media Update

Like many organisations nowadays, the social media have become important methods of communication for JRI. Just as paper gave over to email, it is looking like email is losing out to social media (at least as a means of promoting events and publications).

We are seeing considerable growth in both our Facebook and Twitter communities.



Facebook

[www.facebook.com/JohnRayInitiative](http://www.facebook.com/JohnRayInitiative)



Twitter

<https://twitter.com/JRayI>

On Facebook we have 852 likes, with people from around the world involved, but the majority are British. We started on Twitter in February 2012 and currently have 573 followers. We use both Facebook and Twitter to network people who are interested in environmental issues, to provide general information, and to promote our events and publications.



## CRES Update

The distance learning course, Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (CRES) that we run with A Rocha UK has had another successful year. The highlight of the year is always our residential at Ripon College Cuddesdon (nr. Oxford) in September. We had an excellent programme “Definitely Rural and Environmental” on the Friday, starting with an introduction to CRES and the afternoon field trip. After lunch this was followed by a trip to three sites of local interest, all within a short distance of each other. We began with a visit to Aylesbury Vale Natural Burial Meadow where we were shown round by Sally Whitworth. Sally told us the story of how the natural burial ground came into being, and their plans for the future.

We then moved on to St Peter’s, Owlswick where Keith Gibbons explained their newly installed composting toilet- a much cheaper solution than being attached to the main water system. Finally we visited Orchard View Farm for tea and cake. Several of our party took the opportunity to buy some local produce. Lawson MacKellar then showed us around the farm, mostly looking at their pigs. By the end of the afternoon it was beginning to rain, and it was time to return to Cuddesdon for dinner.

In the evening Dr Richard Gunton led a session on “Why conservation is a religious matter and how it can be Christian”. He explained some of the work of the Faith-in-Scholarship network he is coordinating which is looking at ecosystem services (FiSWES). To end the day Revd. Margot

Hodson led a short evening service and reflection in the chapel with a Taize theme.

First thing on Saturday morning Rev. Philip Wagstaff led us in Morning Prayer on an Iona theme. After breakfast the Saturday morning was spent on four very good student presentations. We began with two first year talks, and then our final year students took over. Rob Hitchcock looked at environmental campaigning, and applied business and Biblical insights, while Martin Parsons considered soil and the best agricultural systems for its preservation. The examiners then retired to consider their verdict, after which Dr Sarah Dunlop (our external examiner) made the official announcement that Rob and Martin had both been awarded Certificates. In addition Martin was granted a distinction. Many congratulations to both!!

Our running total is now 29 Certificates (9 with Distinction) and 4 Diplomas. The first CRES graduates were in 2005, and we have had 12 cohorts so far. So we are averaging 2.8 graduates a year! But many of our graduates have gone on to do significant work in the church, the environment and rural matters. We are sure that both Rob and Martin will not want to stop here and that they will do lots in the future.

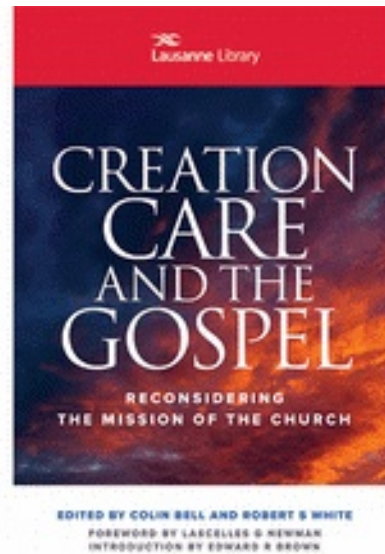
One of the most interesting developments in the last few years has been the increase in interest in CRES from overseas. A few years back Dr. Tjirk van der Ziel from the Netherlands became our first overseas graduate. We now have students on the course from Belgium and South Korea, and there is considerable interest from other parts of the world. The Steering Group are looking into how we might develop the course in the future to make it even more available to overseas students. It appears that CRES is the only course of its type in

the world, and there are many more people who could benefit from it if we can find ways of adapting it. See:

<http://www.cres.org.uk/>

## New Publications

There have been several publications of interest in the last year, and these include:



Colin Bell and Bob White, eds., **"Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church"**

(Hendrickson, 31 May 2016).

Authors include Sir John Houghton; Dave Bookless; John McKeown; Sam Berry; Martin Hodson; Bob Sluka.

Available at

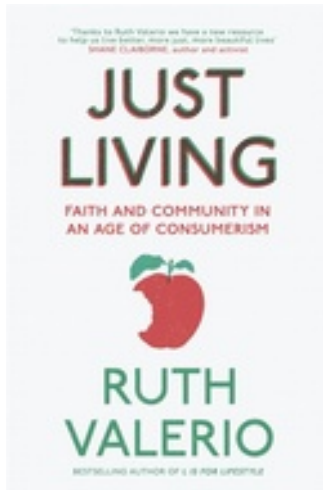
<http://www.hendrickson.com/html/product/707252.trade.html>

Ruth Valerio, **"Just Living; Faith and Community in an Age of Consumerism"**

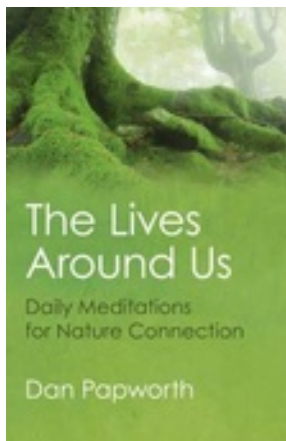
(Hodder & Stoughton, 10 March 2016).

Further details from

[https://www.hodder.co.uk/books/detail\\_page?isbn=9781473613331](https://www.hodder.co.uk/books/detail_page?isbn=9781473613331)



Dan Papworth "The Lives Around Us. Daily meditations for Nature Connection" (Christian Alternative, Winchester, 1 June 2016).



This book was reviewed by Dr Martin Hodson for the JRI Blog at: <http://www.jri.org.uk/blog/the-lives-around-us-daily-meditations-for-nature-connection-by-dan-papworth-christian-alternative-winchester-reviewed-by-dr-martin-hodson/>

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## Finance Update

We are very grateful to all of our supporters for giving so generously to the work of JRI. For a very small organisation we seem to do quite a lot! WE are still running at a small deficit each year, and obviously that cannot continue indefinitely. So if you felt able to contribute something towards our work you can find out how at:

<http://www.jri.org.uk/giving-to-jri/>

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