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# **Living Hopefully in a Time of Climate Change**

**by**

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# Declaration

I certify that this dissertation, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of M.Phil (Ecum.), has not been submitted for a degree at any other University, and that it is entirely my own work. I agree that the Library may lend or copy the dissertation upon request.

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# 1 Introduction

It is incumbent on Christians after Copenhagen to affirm that their calling is love and not war. Marrying duty to love is the great moral project that Christ set before us. The Christian hope is that doing what is right – reducing fossil-fuel use for the sake of the distant neighbour in space and time, whose life is threatened by human-induced drought or flood – is not only duty but also love. Living in love, and not in fear, is genuinely a better, more hopeful, and happier way to live ... so people of faith need to make that spiritual leap of faith, and live differently, hopefully, and lovingly.<sup>1</sup>

The words above are those of the Revd Dr Michael Northcott, Professor of Ethics in the University of Edinburgh, writing after the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations' Framework Convention on climate change held in December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Hopeful words; yet they were written after a Convention which was widely believed to have been a failure, with a hastily written *Copenhagen Accord* – a memorandum of agreement between China, the US and a few other developing nations – the only tangible outcome<sup>2</sup>. Christian Aid, an organization that has long argued for close links between development issues and environmental issues put it more bleakly:

No genuinely meaningful emissions targets.  
Inadequate funding for people in poor countries.  
Copenhagen failed<sup>3</sup>

The Kyoto Protocol, an international legally binding treaty, which was expected to have been ratified in its second phase at the assembly in Copenhagen, was in fact almost discarded with no replacement at all. The developed world seemed to be about to default on the only existing legal emissions treaty that regulates carbon

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<sup>1</sup> [www.operationnoah.org/node/234](http://www.operationnoah.org/node/234) : Accessed 20th April 2010

<sup>2</sup> <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/l07.pdf> : Accessed 21st July 2010

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/Countdown-to-Copenhagen-climate-change/climate-justice-when.aspx> : Accessed 21st July 2010

emissions. The Kyoto Protocol was saved only by the threats from the African and small Island States to walk out of the Copenhagen Conference should it be abandoned. This would have been irony indeed considering that it is the high energy usage of people living in developed countries – the same countries who were about to renege on the emissions treaty – which is the major cause of climate change.

Six months after Copenhagen, writing in the *Church Times* newspaper following the oil disaster caused by the BP Deepwater Rig blowout in the Gulf of Mexico, Northcott had this to say,

Peak oil and climate change are no longer futuristic predictions but already present realities. We know the behaviours that advance getting off oil: cycling and walking instead of driving, taking the train instead of the plane, eating local food and growing what we can, buying fewer clothes, shoes, and electronic goods, contracting with renewable energy suppliers to heat our homes, businesses and churches, and calling on our pension fund managers to invest for a sustainable and post-oil and coal economy. Taking personal responsibility for our own ecological footprint, and then starting to work with others – as the Transition movement is already doing – on the footprints of our towns and cities, the organizations for whom we work, and where we worship, is the only way to end the blame game indulged in against BP. And when we do this we start to live more hopefully and truthfully because we stop pretending that the myriad hidden costs and connections that sustain our ecologically rapacious and wasteful civilization are not moral burdens that we share with the CEOs that do its bidding.<sup>4</sup>

This then is the crucial point – the blame cannot continue to be laid solely at the feet of big business and governments – all have to accept responsibility for the earth's problems. As individuals and as a society the tendency has been to veer between denial and despair; denial that a problem exists and despair that there can be a solution to the problem. John Houghton in his introduction to Northcott's book *A Moral Climate: the ethics of global warming* speaks of this pitfall:

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<sup>4</sup> [www.churchtimes.co.uk](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk) Issue 7683, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2010 : Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2010

[In the era of climate change] two extreme attitudes are commonly held. The first is *Denial* – doomsters are hyping it up and things are just not that serious. The second is *Despair* – the doomsters are right and we are already beyond the point of no return. Neither demands action. With the first, action is not necessary, with the second it is too late. Inaction always seems a comfortable position!<sup>5</sup>

There are few now who would deny that we have reached crisis stage in climate change. The impact of the information about the state of our environment causes both fear and grief – which accentuate the states of either denial or despair that many people find themselves in. The problems seem so insurmountable, so global, that it invites paralysis not action. As Sallie McFague points out in *A New Climate for Theology : God, the World, and Global Warming :*

One critical issue is the motivation to act. We must realize that the ‘problem’ is in our heads and hearts as much as it is in the policies of governments and of multinational corporations<sup>6</sup>

Since Christians believe that all are accountable to God for what is done with creation, hence they face the question of how they are to fulfill that responsibility in the light of our contemporary problems? In the book *When Enough is Enough : A Christian Framework for Environmental Sustainability*, John Houghton recalls the words of the eighteenth century Irish philosopher Edmund Burke who said that ‘No one made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do so little’<sup>7</sup>

The harsh realities of the current ecological problems have forced us to think again about our attitudes to the environment, to re-examine the roots of these attitudes and then to adjust our ethical vision to incorporate environmental protection as part of an inclusive vision, identifying the radical lifestyle changes that will need to take

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<sup>5</sup> Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: the ethics of global warming* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007, page viii)

<sup>6</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 25)

<sup>7</sup> R. J. Berry (Ed.) *When Enough is Enough : A Christian Framework for Environmental Sustainability* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007, page 67)

place on the part of individuals and as communities if we are to begin to halt the advance of ecological collapse. That is not even to reverse the damage, but simply to halt the consequences of global warming that are already unavoidable due to past emissions.

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment report – - Climate Change 2007 (AR4) – makes for grim reading.

Vulnerability appears to be high in the case of extreme events or exceptional episodes, even in developed countries, as documented by the agricultural response to, and excess mortality occurring in, the 2003 heat waves in Europe... However, the 2003 European heat wave and the 2005 hurricane season in the North Atlantic show that, despite possessing considerable adaptive capacity, even developed nations are vulnerable if they do not mobilise adaptation measures in a timely and efficient manner.<sup>8</sup>

In the following chapters, two Christian community initiatives are examined, one from the Roman Catholic tradition and one from my own Anglican tradition, both of which acknowledge in the first instance that a problem exists and both of which have attempted to become, as communities, part of the solution.

By highlighting the areas in Christian thinking that points to the value of all creation, these communities are in the process of trying to have their Christian theology engage with the ecological concerns of our society. The case studies' achievements in their own communities and the wider community are noted, examining particularly how their own tradition impacted on their responses, how they were resourced, what resistance was met and from what quarter.

In the course of this dissertation, two community-based initiatives from the extra-ecclesiastical world, an Eco Village scheme and a Transition Town initiative are briefly examined, together with an analysis of what elements were observed in the

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.ipcc.ch/publications\\_and\\_data/ar4/wg2/en/ch1s1-5.html](http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg2/en/ch1s1-5.html) : Accessed 22nd July 2010



two main case studies. In conclusion, existing models or ethical stances are examined to determine whether there is an ecumenical approach applicable to this area and how the continuing discussion is to be resourced theologically.

But before we can begin to examine how some communities are responding to climate change issues, we need to look back a little in time to understand what those issues are and how they have become frontline issues for us all.

## **1.1 The Development of JPIC**

In the 1970s, the World Council of Churches (WCC) recognized the connections that existed between ecological sustainability and Justice and Peace issues. It was felt that social justice and ecological action made sense only when they were considered together as part of the same crisis, because the ethical issues involved in all three areas of Justice, Peace and the environment are closely related.

An example taken from the Brazilian forest is given in Deane-Drummond's book *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology* which helps to illustrate this interconnectedness.<sup>9</sup> The direct causes of rain forest depletion are agriculture, logging (both for timber and for industry), cattle ranching and development. Other causes are human population growth, the survival needs of the poor and world demand for forest products. Although the timber industry leaves a trail of wastage and ecological destruction, there is no doubt that the sale of its goods meets the urgent need for the foreign currency to pay back loans from earlier 'development' projects. Whose interests have a clear priority in this case? Who takes responsibility? Deane-Drummond points to many different ethical issues at play. If we take an

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<sup>9</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology* (London: SCM Press, 1996, pages 75 – 76)

*anthropocentric* view, the argument could be that the survival needs of the local people outweigh the damage to the ecosystem; but, on the other hand, is this taking the long-term survival needs of people in general into account, if the depletion of the forests over time will change the climate through an increase in carbon dioxide level in the atmosphere? Then, from a *biocentric* point of view, the non-human species in the tropical rainforest have survival rights too. There is also the added complication of determining who has the priority interest among the human population itself – the poor of the land versus the multinational companies, government officials and world economic system. A further ethical dimension may be that some of the money gained from the logging is being used for military purposes, perhaps even to keep the local population sufficiently oppressed to allow the destruction in the first place!

These are typical scenarios found in many unstable areas of the ‘two thirds’ world and they highlight the complex and related ethical issues surrounding justice, peace and integrity of creation.

Indeed, at the time of writing this dissertation, the media are reporting on a situation in Borneo where many local Penan women are allegedly being harassed and raped by Malaysian government sponsored loggers who are at the same time devastating the forest that the Penan tribe rely upon for survival.<sup>10</sup>

Even as long as 30 years ago, it was becoming clear that peace and justice depended on a healthy ecosystem where the basics of existence are available to all. Hence, at the WCC’s 1983 Vancouver Assembly, the member churches were encouraged to commit publically to a common effort to promote issues of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, which became known as the JPIC process.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/12672> : Accessed 21st July 2010

The Assembly had realized that environmental problems needed to be tackled along with issues to do with justice, and human rights and peace; and in deliberately choosing the phrase ‘Integrity of Creation,’ the Assembly was ensuring that a *biocentric* view was taken into account along with the more usual *anthropocentric* view so that ‘the liberation of human beings from oppressive structures could then become extended to include the liberation of nature from human manipulation.’<sup>11</sup>

In 1988, the WCC launched its Climate Change Program to promote the transformation of both personal lifestyles and of socio-economic structures that feed into global warming. 1990 saw the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation meet in Seoul, South Korea. Important outcomes from this convocation were that the participants entered into covenant regarding four main issues as well as agreeing to ten general affirmations. The concrete issues included: working towards a just economic order and liberation from the bondage of foreign debt; valuing the true security of all nations and peoples and a culture of non-violence; building a culture that can live in harmony with creation’s integrity and preserving the gift of the earth’s atmosphere to nurture and sustain the world’s life; and working towards the eradication of racism and discrimination on all levels for all peoples, and finally the dismantling of patterns of behaviour that perpetuate the sin of racism. The ten affirmations from the Seoul gathering, listed below, also clearly demonstrated the agreed principled stance of those gathered. The Affirmations were:

1. regarding the exercise of power as accountable to God
2. God’s option for the poor
3. the equal value of all races and peoples
4. male and female as created in the image of God
5. truth is at the foundation of a community of free people
6. the peace of Jesus Christ

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<sup>11</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology* (London: SCM Press, 1996, page 76). Note also the 2000 Earth Charter’s statement that it’s ‘inclusive ethical vision recognises that environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development and peace are interdependent and indivisible’ [www.earthcharterinaction.org](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org) : Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June 2010

7. the creation as beloved of God
8. the earth as the Lord's
9. the dignity and commitment of the younger generation
10. and human rights as being given by God<sup>12</sup>

The key phrase in the JPIC programme, from this dissertation's perspective, is of course 'Integrity of Creation,' which as a phrase called for honesty and uprightness while at the same time, theologically, it affirms that creation is dependent on its Creator while also having a worth in its own right. The phrase reminds us also that humankind is just a part of the totality of all that is created. This filled a theological void that had existed till then as Sallie McFague explains:

All theology is contextual: there is no theology 'in general'. It always presupposes a context, a place, in which one stands to speak about who we human beings are. Thus, our theological anthropologies speak from the context of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, geographical location and so on. But there is one context that has been neglected in the last few hundred years: human beings as a species among many others in a home we all share. Thus, several decades ago the WCC enlarged its motto from 'Peace and Justice' to 'Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation' Peace and Justice depend on a healthy ecosystem, for there can be no peace or justice unless the basics of existence are available to all. Hence, in addition to the many other contexts for interpreting who we are, we also must remember the cosmological one. We must move beyond Democracy to Biorcracy, beyond loyalty to our own tribe to a view of ourselves as citizens of Planet Earth<sup>13</sup>

The integrity of creation gave a sense of the ethical perspective that was emerging, one which encouraged a God-centered or *Theocentric*<sup>14</sup> view, which holds both human interests and the interests of the entire natural world together. It

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<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Lossky, Jose Miquez Bonino, JohnPobee, Tom F. Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright & Pauline Webb (Eds.) *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002, page 632)

<sup>13</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 58)

<sup>14</sup> 'A theocentric perspective towards nature holds together both poles of our understanding – the specifically human and the broader context of the whole natural worlds in which human life is set ... All three terms 'Justice', 'Peace' and 'Integrity of Nature' are to be recognised as indispensable dimensions of a contemporary Christian Ethic'. David Gosling *A New Earth : Covenanting for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: CCBI, 1992, page 68). This perspective will be discussed in more detail later in this dissertation.

emphasizes that we all inhabit, or live into, God's earth; and, the phrase reminds us of the interconnectedness and wholeness of creation and of our calling to actually do something to heal and renew the earth. As David Gosling puts it in his book *A New Earth : Covenanting for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*

The duty of the Church is to be a sign of the world's coming into being, inviting people to participate in God's creative activity, which encompasses the whole of creation ...

The Church is called by God to articulate the vision of *shalom* (Christ ascended), our yearning and the yearning of the whole of creation for it, and to define the path to be taken in terms of what we can see in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ – a path that is celebrated in worship whereby Christians offer the world to God and pray that it may achieve its destiny.<sup>15</sup>

Nature is thus seen as revelatory of the divine, the cosmos is seen as a place of mystery, holy ground. God is close, immanent; this implies a renewed, a sacramental approach which calls people to embrace the mission to heal and restore creation by adopting environmentally sustainable lifestyles as daily spiritual practice so as to act as models for others.

This – sacramental – approach was the motivation behind the first of the case studies, and it is explained in more detail in chapter two.

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<sup>15</sup> David Gosling *A New Earth: Covenanting for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: CCBI, 1992, page 9)

## **2 Living Sacramentally : a Roman Catholic response**

### **2.1 Introduction**

I first heard of the County Wicklow Dominican Farm and Ecology Centre, called *An Tairseach* (which in English means ‘The Threshold’) during 2007 when my son visited there, with his Religious Education class, as part of his Leaving Certificate course. His positive impressions intrigued me; as up until that point, he would have viewed a group of Religious Sisters living together in community as an anachronism in the twenty-first century. Yet at the time, he had been impressed with what he had seen, heard and experienced in the centre.

My daughter followed this same route in 2009 when she too visited the centre with her class group as part of her studies. While she had been equally impressed with the Centre, her visit was clouded by the behaviour of some Christian Fundamentalists in her school group who had insolently called into question the validity of the Sister’s Christian ethos, even going so far as to suggest that it was pagan rather than Christian traditions that were being followed. When I asked her how this had been dealt with, her description of the Sister’s deft handling of these rude teenagers made me want even more to visit this community and experience it for myself. I undertook a field visit in June 2010.

### **2.2 *An Tairseach***

The Dominican Sisters established the Farm and Ecology Centre in 1998 on their 70 acre lands in Wicklow. They wished to have a new beginning and, to begin to live in an alternative and more sustainable way, working with the land and through this to have a renewed relationship with the whole community of life, human and non-

human. The name '*An Tairseach*' was carefully chosen to suggest what the Dominican Sisters wished their centre to become – a threshold. They see their farm and ecology centre as providing an opening into a new awareness of the interconnection and interdependence of all life. By creating this centre and welcoming others to it, they hope to allow others to develop and deepen this awareness.

In their organic farm, they model good farming practice where soil fertility is valued and where their food is grown and sold in their farm shop. At the same time, woodlands, hedgerows and other wild life habitats are preserved. A special conservation area of 10 acres has been set aside as a sanctuary for wild-life and they maintain habitats to increase biodiversity.

Their original nineteenth century convent has been refurbished thoughtfully, with a wood-pellet heating system and solar panels, movement sensitive lighting and energy efficient bulbs, and low usage flushing systems; and it seems that every recommended green alternative available has been employed. One particularly useful innovation for me was all the inspiring posters and notices at various spots around the house. For instance, when washing one's hands there was a little poster to remind you that the Earth is one planet and it's water is one water, all flowing from the same source. The effect of these sorts of notices was to help forge connections to a greater whole and remind readers of how their actions affect others. I considered this to be an excellent way of inserting inspiration into actions that had previously been something purely functional.

The main building also has a conference centre, a meditation room, a large chapel, lecture rooms, a library, an art room and also excellent residential facilities. Most of the rooms were equipped with a small kitchen and bathroom.

In the immediate grounds of the centre, there is an organic garden, a wilderness area, a meditation garden and an orchard. On one of the sunny days that I visited, the penned-in orchard area was peaceful and calm, with long-haired sheep nibbling away at the grass and daisies, under the flower heavy trees – an idyllic nature scene worthy of a Constable painting which provided nourishment for the imagination. While I was aware that these animals would end up in the Farm Shop at some stage, at the same time there was a sense of satisfaction that surely there were no luckier sheep in County Wicklow on that particular day.

In the meditation garden there is a Cosmic Walk labyrinth. The walk is set into the ground in the shape of a large spiral of bricks and stones. The stones are painted with a timeline of scenes of events through our cosmic history, beginning in the central point, representing the ‘Flaring Forth,’ and moving to the last and outer stone bringing us to the present day. In this simple and effective way, it provides a sense of the vastness of time and space of the universe. I found it to be a most humbling experience to walk and trace the story of the earth’s process.

### **2.2.1 What does the community offer?**

In their centre for Ecology and Spirituality, the community offers a wide variety of courses and retreats. Diverse courses include organic gardening, alternative energy awareness programmes, art, dance, meditation, theology and spirituality courses. The community serves healthy, seasonal, organic meals for course participants and has had to add a vegetarian cooking class to its list of courses as a result of the interest generated.



These extensive facilities allow the Sisters to spread their vision widely, through residential courses, retreats, school educational trips, parish visits (when I visited the centre there had been a large group of people from a parish in Tallaght, County Dublin, on a day-long retreat led by their parish priest) as well as Open Days when guided tours are offered of the entire farm.

The eco centre programmes help to teach others how to put ethical principles into practice. By using art, music, dance and rituals like the cosmic walk, the community is teaching others simply by celebrating their relationship with creation.

### **2.2.2 In conversation**

When I spoke to the Sisters, it became obvious to me that they are living their mission of *telling the story*<sup>16</sup> One of the community Sr. Marian O' Sullivan OP, told me that the idea for the farm and centre took life within their own community, but that they had been inspired by outside sources, in particular the experience of Miriam Therese MacGillis , a Dominican sister and the founder of Genesis Farm in New Jersey. MacGillis herself claims her inspiration from the writings and life of Thomas Berry<sup>17</sup> (indeed, one of the pamphlets for *An Tairseach* contains a quotation from Thomas Berry 'We have silenced too many of those wonderful voices of the Universe that spoke to us of the grand mysteries of existence,' and another recommends Berry's books *The Dream of the Earth* and *The Great Work* as worthwhile to reading before

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<sup>16</sup> *Telling the story* is a technique of the late Eco theologian and Roman Catholic Priest Thomas Berry which encourages people who have grown away from the planet and forgotten their basic connection to the heart of the universe to allow the story to heal, guide and discipline them back into relationship with creation. Ref. Sarah McFarland Taylor *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007, page 7)

<sup>17</sup> Sarah McFarland Taylor *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007, page 200)

attending the Conference – we shall discuss Berry and his influence on the centre a little later, below).

Sr. Marian explained to me that they had heard MacGillis' audio tape *The Fate of the Earth* and had invited her to come to Ireland to give talks and courses to their community. The outcome of that was that when the General Chapter met in 1992, there was a strong impulse to do something practical. The community in Wicklow was chosen as there was already land attached to the Convent. It was decided at that stage to have a theoretical as well as a practical component to the project. Sr. Marian said that at that time, the reason the community felt a compelling reason to do something in this area was its conviction that the Earth was in peril and it considered that a missing piece in Ireland was in the provision of education.

Sr. Marian pointed out that, as the sisters learned more, they chose not to use the word 'Environment,' as it implies that human beings are the centre and all other life-forms are just the environment, whereas they wanted to educate others to understand that the natural world exists in its own right. She said that they quickly realised that there was a whole spirituality to be discovered which asked many searching questions in the style of Thomas Aquinas such as; Who is God? , What is God? , Who am I in this universe? What does Salvation mean? But this spirituality also caused the community to question exactly for whom Salvation is intended; is it only for humans? What is the meaning of the scriptural word there will be a new heaven and a new earth? These were the sort of questions which she said had motivated and informed their new way of being community.

Sr. Marian confirmed that the Wicklow community had been fully supported by its superiors, both financially and morally. She admitted that some of the sisters

had not understood what the ecology centre was about but that no obstruction was met.

She pointed out that most of the sisters are pleased that something was happening in this area as that allowed them to continue living as normal in the knowledge that at least someone in their Order was doing something for the environment. She did mention that the local people in Wicklow seemed glad that the Order had not sold their land as many similar congregations had done at that time. Some locals buy their produce in the Farm Shop, some attend their courses and while many do not know what exactly the Eco Centre stands for, all appreciate the business that the Centre brings to the town in particular with the foreign student groups that visit each summer.

### **2.2.3 Opposition**

Sr Marian seemed glad that the diocese has no jurisdiction over the community but pointed out that they had not tried to impede in any way, although she laughingly said that if they could prove they were teaching heresy they could jump in. This may seem amusing, but it has been the experience of some sisters involved in the environmental movement. The spiritual ecology of the sisters in Wicklow brings together both environmental activism and nature mysticism into a new form of religious life which is not always appreciated by the mainstream religious groups.

When Sarah McFarland Taylor was researching for her book *Green Sisters : A Spiritual Ecology*, (a book that was recommended to me by Sr Marian) she came across many such incidents of official disapproval of environmental consciousness, and not just at local diocesan level either. In 1993, Pope John Paul II issued a

condemnation of what he called ‘Nature Worship,’ warning that ‘The Christian faith itself is in danger of being undermined. Sometimes forms of nature worship and the celebration of myths and symbols take the place of the worship of the God revealed in Jesus Christ’<sup>18</sup>

McFarland Taylor also notes that Thomas Berry’s approach is singled out for censure by Walter Grazer , then director of the Environmental Justice Program for the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC), who claimed that Berry wants to put ‘scripture on the shelf for a while,’ which in Grazer’s view is going too far left for the average American Catholic.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, in as much as the allegedly-withheld scientific report managed to cast doubt over the IPCC’s entire contribution to the climate change debate,<sup>20</sup> Grazer’s worry is that Berry’s approach is allowing conservative Catholics to disregard anything to do with the environment because they can label it all as paganism. In an official Holy See publication on Catholic teaching on the Environment, the author Russell Sparkes further explains this point of view:

However, I feel it only fair to express my concern that Berry goes beyond standard Catholic teaching in downplaying the importance of Scripture and the Church’s traditional teaching in ascribing such importance to the natural world. .. I mention this merely to warn the reader interested in reading more Christian thinking on ecology that some of it is definitely not orthodox!<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah McFarland Taylor *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007, page 46)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid page 48

<sup>20</sup> This refers to the scandal when a hacker stole and released scores of documents including emails from a server at Britain’s Climate Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia, which is a major climate-change research centre. It later emerged that some of these documents suggested that data on human activity and global warming may have been deliberately suppressed so as not to cast doubt on the overall findings of the IPCC. As the Washington Post Editorial of November 25th 2009 put it ‘Climate scientists should not let themselves be goaded by the irresponsibility of the deniers into overstating the certainties of complex science or, worse, censoring discussion of them’  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/24/AR2009112403549.html> : Accessed 21st July 2010

The IPCC refuted the claim of the hacker saying ‘no individual or small group of scientists is in the position to exclude a peer-reviewed paper from an IPCC assessment’

<http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/presentations/rkp-statement-4dec09.pdf> : Accessed 22nd July 2010

<sup>21</sup> Russell Sparkes *Global Warming* (London: CTS Publications, 2009, page 25)

I have personally experienced this narrow view of ecotheology, although it was not in a Roman Catholic context. In 2002, while I was still an ordinand in theological college in Dublin, I was accused by a fellow student of being, in his words ‘A Priestess of Wicca’ for having the temerity to attend the April 22<sup>nd</sup> Earth Day Liturgy in a City Park. It was easy to laugh it off as a crank observation at the time, but it serves to highlight a basic problem for some people in separating out naturalism – that is the doctrine that all religious truths come from nature and not from revelation – and nature itself.

As McFarland Taylor points out, worries exist about the kind of spontaneity that forms spiritual beliefs about nature without the guidance of scripture and Church-based authority.<sup>22</sup> The sisters who support Berry’s theological approach may dismiss such criticisms, but they can sometimes be confronted by similar accusations and assumptions, indeed as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, this was exactly what had happened when my daughter visited the Wicklow centre with her school.

Another critique perhaps of the sacramental model is that it values the natural above the man-made, in other words, it prefers the wilderness meadow to the housing estate. There is no point in setting aside a little pristine wilderness if at the same time other less traditionally beautiful areas are treated as no more than a commodity ‘The wilderness of the Sahara will disappear unless little pieces of non-wilderness become intensely loved by lots of people’ is how Wes Jackson of the Land Institute in Salina, Kansas states the matter, thus highlighting that either every square foot deserves our respect or none of it does.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sarah McFarland Taylor *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007, page 49)

<sup>23</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996, page 240)

## 2.2.4 Spirituality

Pantheism has long been regarded as a heresy; to understand God as the world and the world as God is seen to collapse God into the world and damage God's otherness, blurring into a vague womblike sense of harmony. Those who mistrust Berry's theology think that he fell into a creation-centered spirituality, sacramentalising nature to the diminishment of God's transcendence, but Berry's Pantheism is a different animal, seeing God in the world but not putting limits on God either. Larry Rasmussen argues that :

God is not totally encompassed by the creaturely, but the creaturely is the one and only place we know the divine fullness in the manner appropriate to our own fullness<sup>24</sup>

The pantheistic awareness of God is sacramental awareness where the sacraments are considered vehicles of God's grace coming to us with the form of matter. For most Christians, the actual bread and wine are the Body and Blood of Christ, the waters of baptism symbolize new birth as the initiate is raised up from the waters of chaos and death. While the Catholic and Orthodox Churches recognize seven sacraments, regardless of how many sacraments are available in the Christian traditions, these traditions also recognize that the principle of sacramentality means much more than this.

Creation itself is sacramental. According to Genesis, everything that God created was 'very good,' and so the view is that God's goodness comes to us through Creation.<sup>25</sup> The traditional understanding is of humankind as stewards of creation but

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<sup>24</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996, page 280)

<sup>25</sup> *The Green Bible, NRSV* (London: Collins, 2008, Genesis 1:31)

this may allow or encourage us to treat nature as something apart from us, and to allow humankind to be fully in control, ‘managing’ the planet – sometimes in a benign way but always in the end for the benefit of humankind as apart from ‘nature’.

Traditional theology begins usually with theoretical doctrines rather than experience in community. This allows the theology to be remote from the experience. The sisters in the Dominican Community in County Wicklow are looking to live out a different model. The Bossey Circle (see Appendix A) is, a World Council of Churches diagram and a methodological tool designed to show the interplay between the four elements of science, theology, ethics, and action. It underscores how our theology informs our ethics, which in turn informs our action, which in turn informs our scientific and social analysis which in turn informs our theology, and so on; the Bossey Circle offer a way to understand what the sisters are trying to do in *An Tairseach*.

Our understanding of the integrity of creation influences our perspective on all other areas of our lives. In their own way, the sisters in *An Tairseach* want to bring a new awareness of the interconnectedness, interdependency and unity of all life. They are looking again at their tradition, at their scriptures, asking the questions mentioned earlier and in this light are discerning God’s requirements for creation care. Then they are asking ‘Now what must we do?’ and are putting what they know and believe into practice.

As a religious community, they have made ecological sustainability a part of their daily spiritual discipline by living sacramentally. As Sallie McFague puts it:

An incarnational understanding of creation says nothing is too lowly, too physical, too mean a labour if it helps creation to flourish, we find God in

caring for the garden, in loving the earth well, this becomes our devotion, our central task. Climate Change then, becomes a major Christian issue. To be a Christian in our time, one must respond to the consequences of Global Warming.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.3 Conclusion

At the end of my stay with the sisters in Wicklow, I wrote a note in my journal that my experience in meeting the sisters and seeing them at their work, had the effect of driving a wedge into my consciousness. The discipline of daily life infused with moments for contemplation and spiritual reflection encourages us to live differently; in fact I would challenge anyone to stay and learn with the sisters and remain untouched.

Paul Hypher, a member of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales pointed out that 'There is a clear complementarity between the Roman Catholic emphasis on creation and sacramental theology and the Reformed emphasis on penance and conversion'<sup>27</sup> and in the next chapter, I look at a second case study, one in which I was personally involved, where one Anglican diocese is trying to live prophetically by repenting of its old way of living and living in a new, more sustainable way.

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<sup>26</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 73)

<sup>27</sup> David Gosling *A New Earth : Covenanting for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: CCBI, 1992, page 74)



## **3 Living Prophetically : an Anglican response**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Given my personal involvement in the case study examined in this chapter, methodologically I have relied primarily on narrative to enable the reader and writer to gain a better sense of perspective about what has happened in the past and what may happen in the future.

My diocese of Cashel & Ossory in the Church of Ireland (a province of the Anglican Communion), covers an enormous geographical area in the south east; counties Kilkenny, Carlow, Laois, Tipperary, Wexford, Waterford, and Wicklow. The diocese is attempting to live prophetically within the guidelines of a Green Charter which affirms its commitment to environmental awareness.

The driving force behind this initiative is the Right Reverend Michael Burrows, bishop of Cashel and Ossory, who was consecrated to the diocese in July 2006. He is convinced that his churches should be encouraging their congregations to adopt a more energy friendly lifestyle, especially perhaps in their use of fossil fuel. This led him in January 2008 to convene a small diocesan environmental awareness committee consisting of himself together with Marianne Young, a Lay parishioner in Wexford and myself, a Vicar in Kilkenny.

The charge to this deliberately compact committee was to look closely at the diocese and examine how we could give a lead to the whole community through our worship and our living by making a visible link between the environment and faith at a local level. We wanted to see how we could encourage, at a diocesan level, the drive to have a new sense of what was 'enough' based on a less materialistic view of what constituted a good life.

A personal response does not just mean an individual response. We wanted to think as *persons-in-community*<sup>28</sup> or as individual members of a wider network, in this case, the diocese. We wanted to see what could be done at this level to impact on the problem of climate change.

The two committee members had been chosen by the bishop to represent different perspectives and geographical areas. Marianne is an Australian married to an Irish farmer and living in Wexford, she has had extensive exposure to climate change issues in her native Australia where they have been feeling the effects of global warming for many years now and her agricultural experience in Ireland was to prove invaluable in the months ahead. I had been chosen as an urban dweller with an interest in both ecology and theology.

## **3.2 The Process**

The first stage of the process was to familiarize ourselves with what was happening in the world outside of our diocese. We both attended a ‘Christians in Science’ conference with a theme of ‘Ireland and Global Warming’ which was held in Belfast in February 2008. The speakers were first class; Prof. Sir John Houghton FRS of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) spoke on the global emergency from an international perspective, Dr. John Sweeney of ICARUS Maynooth spoke on the impact global warming was having on Ireland and finally Prof. Bob White FRS of the Faraday Institute, Cambridge spoke on possible Christian responses to global warming. A lively questions and answers session brought many interesting perspectives to light. Most of the conference attendees were from the Scientific community and therefore some of the topics aired during this session were

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<sup>28</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996, page 145)

extremely technical which detracted slightly from our experience as neither of us has a scientific background.

After this conference, we had several meetings as a group to discuss how best we could proceed as a diocese. We wanted to highlight the ecological crisis as we understood it and to promote a way of living that would encourage sustainable lifestyles within the diocese in order to help reverse our contribution to climate change.

The 'Green Charter' (see appendix B) was the eventual outcome of these meetings. This, we considered, would provide a framework for living prophetically and lightly in our world. We planned to introduce the Charter at our annual Diocesan Synod, where we would propose its adoption by the gathered delegates. On the practical side, we arranged to have A3 Charters printed and laminated, one for each of the 149 Churches in the diocese. We thought that following good Protestant tradition, this laminated poster could be nailed to the door of the church declaring to the world our intentions! We also arranged to have the 296 pages *Green Pages*<sup>29</sup> Guide distributed to each of the Select Vestries<sup>30</sup> in the diocese. This guide might be termed the environmentally friendly Yellow Pages as whatever service or product is being sought, the green pages will have the eco-friendly version of it. Buying 200 of these national directories ensured that each Select Vestry had a comprehensive list of green products and services at their fingertips, and would be encouraged to take the green option when purchasing services or supplies or planning renovations.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.greenpages.ie/> : Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> July 2010

<sup>30</sup> Select Vestries are the democratically elected groups in each parish that control the '3 Fs' – the Fabric, Furnishings and Finance of the parish

A final initiative considered worthwhile at the time was to simultaneously launch an annual environmental competition which would encourage parishes to undertake various eco friendly projects and I speak more about this later below.

### **3.2.1 Diocesan Synod**

And so in October 2008, at the Cashel & Ossory diocesan Synod, held that year in Carlow, a proposal was made to the assembled delegates that a Green Charter be adopted by the diocese. In order to outline our Christian responsibility in this area, the delegates listened to a summary of the reasons why the Green Charter route had been taken.

The Prophet Isaiah's words were quoted 'They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them'<sup>31</sup> reminding delegates of the fact that in a warming world, the words of the prophet Isaiah must surely be our vision for all those affected by a changing climate. For this vision to become reality, it will require a change in the way that we live. As Christians, God calls us to engage with our world. We are supposed to be stewards of his Creation. We acknowledged that in our diocese, some churches are already taking action to tackle the implications of climate change and we applauded these initiatives. We explained that what we are trying to do with the Green Charter is to help and encourage that move forward. We thought that this could be achieved in many different ways; by changing the way in which church buildings can be made more energy efficient, by making our churchyards friendlier to wildlife, by waste reduction in our parish and diocesan offices. We also could encourage recycling and composting or by thinking of green transport and car sharing – in fact we need to change our lifestyles both individually

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<sup>31</sup> *The Green Bible, NRSV* (London: Collins, 2008, Isaiah 49:10)

and collectively. We considered that as a diocese, we needed to take seriously the negative consequences of our oil dependent lifestyles, and actively encourage our own church communities to increase the pace of their initiatives to meet the challenge of climate change. We highlighted that as a community, we continue to try to live as if there was no tomorrow. This has to be challenged as our current lifestyles are fundamentally unsustainable, depending as they do on 'cheap' oil, and excessive use of non-renewable energy means supplies dwindle, while at the same time, pollution becomes worse.

It was pointed out to the synod that from a Christian point of view at least three values come into play: the need to respect the non-human world for its own value and not as a human commodity, recalling that everything is part of God's wider creation, and remembering that God created the universe before the earth; the earth before people; and people before the Church. The purposes of God go way back into history and do not just start with us.

As a diocese, we must emphasise the need for justice for those places and people who bear the brunt of the damage and pain provoked by human-induced climate change. For poor communities around the world, living in far more extreme climates, there is no switch to flick. For them a changing climate means droughts, floods, crops failing and diseases spreading, with no resources to adapt to the changes. It was felt that as a Christian community, we must acknowledge a 'preferential option for the poor,' a biblical principle highlighted by liberation theologians. We have a responsibility for future generations – human and planetary. The Christian tradition speaks of the life of the world to come, which needs to be earthed and not totally spiritualised. We should not pass on a poisonous legacy for others to sort out in the future.

We explained that we could develop visions, as a diocese, for being and living differently in an excessively consumerist world. Our local action makes a difference and it must begin with each of us, each parish in our Diocese has an important role to play.

The Green Charter framework would enable us to shout our priorities from the rooftop, to declare our green gospel, as Sallie McFague says :

Religions have as much right to argue for their views of the Abundant Life as do the market forces that endlessly preach a consumer utopia for the privileged few<sup>32</sup>

### **3.2.2 Eco Competition**

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, in October 2008 we simultaneously launched a diocesan Environment Awareness Competition which is now in its second year. Parishes or Parish sponsored groups in the diocese can enter this competition in the various categories, which loosely followed the five statements in the Green Charter, with a Capital Project, an Environmental Diligence, a Motivation of the Young, a Church Environs and a Global Awareness category.

In 2009, we had winners in the first four categories but unfortunately none in the Global Awareness category and at the time of writing, all entries have been received for the 2010 competition and yet again we have not had an entry in this category. This is disappointing and we are aware that we need to rethink how to motivate our parishes to think globally as well as locally, as by just thinking locally

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<sup>32</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 37)

we run the risk of separating the integrity of creation from the global issues of Justice and Peace.

In both 2009 and 2010, the range of entries submitted were interesting and varied and have helped inform the committee as to what was happening on the ground in the various parishes in the diocese. This information can then be drawn upon when planning educational exercises like the Eco Seminars or specific pamphlets to be distributed to parishes.

In 2009 there was a great range of initiatives across the diocese which demonstrated just how imaginative people can be. Projects like the entry from the church community in Freshford, County Kilkenny who won the capital Project category. This parish undertook major restoration work in its ancient church and installed a solar-powered heating system, which keeps both the church and parish centre at a comfortable 18 degrees Celsius. They managed to take into consideration the utilization of modern alternative energy systems while at the same time ensuring that the historical structure of this nineteenth century church ,which incorporates a listed twelfth century porch, was maintained.

Last year, the Church Environs winner was a parish with a thirteenth century church graveyard in Stradbally, County Waterford. They replaced a sizeable amount of their aging trees with new trees which included holly, copper beech, lime and hawthorn. The initiative involved all the local community as the trees were sponsored by both parishioners and local tradespeople.

In the Motivation of the Young category, the Carlow Town Group of parishes organised confirmation classes in biology, history and animal husbandry, all on location in the forest gardens of Johnstown House in Carlow. The young people learned all about the reproduction system of trees in the property while studying the

saddleback pigs who roam freely in the estate forest. The class was introduced to both the environmental and historical value of the property and presented reports on their visit. Such was their praise and enthusiasm for the project that a further visit for other interested parish members had to be arranged.

The Environmental Diligence category award went to a parish in Goresbridge County Carlow who are lucky enough to have the rarely seen cowslip in great abundance in their church grounds and adjoining graveyard. The seeds were saved by workgroups of parishioners throughout the early summer and distributed to parishes in the diocese to encourage the regeneration of this beautiful wild flower.

The 2010 entries look just as exciting as last year, and although judging has not yet taken place, the entries received include solar panels on a Rectory, bird feeding programs, wildflower sanctuaries and ecologically sensitive restoration programs.

### **3.2.3 Eco Seminars**

The Environmental Awareness committee also organise annual Eco Seminars both to educate and to generate interest in different ecological areas. These were held in different parts of the diocese in 2009 and 2010 to encourage greater local participation.

In 2009, we held the event in Leighlinbridge, County Carlow where we invited various speakers on a general theme of Eco Awareness. The first speaker was the Dean of Leighlin, the Very Revd Gordon Wynne, who spoke on *Our Christian Responsibility to the Global Effects of Climate Change*. In an interesting paper, he made the point that in his view the three most important things underpinning the balance of our world were Environment, Ecumenism and Fair Trade. The next



speaker was Jonathan Fitzpatrick from A-Rated Retrofitting speaking on *Practical changes and understanding Government Regulations and Grants*. He listed many things that can be done to improve the energy rating in homes, highlighting the Sustainable Energy Ireland website as a starting place to source local suppliers and grants that are available. Richard Sherlock from Daikin spoke next on the theme of *Understanding Alternative Energy systems and cost effectiveness*. He helped shed some light on the very many systems that are out there, explaining basic concepts and terms that can cause confusion such as 'Kmh : Kilo Watt Hours'. The fourth speaker was Lorcan Scott from Wildlife Ireland who gave a fascinating talk on *Wildlife & Fauna Awareness in our Church Environs*. Some of the other Stands at the Seminar then had an opportunity to address the gathering, the group behind Leighlinbridge's successful bid to be Ireland's first Fairtrade Village told us of their journey, Transition Towns & Futureproof Kilkenny spoke of the various initiatives that were up and running locally and Christian Aid showed some of the many resources available for children and youth groups which can help get across the impact of climate change in the world. Finally a local Green supplier, Mark Shirley from 2Eva demonstrated some of his equipment which included a device which monitors heat/heat-loss which he said had been used in some Irish airports for detecting fever in Swine flu victims about to travel. The event was well attended and received a lot of local media interest, aided by the fact that, at that time, we had the only Green Mayor in the Country within our Diocese.

The 2010 Eco Seminar held in Kilkenny in May focused on Water as a neglected issue and the theme of the event was *Water – what would we do without it*. Marianne Young of the diocesan environmental committee gave an interesting talk on the potential of water to provide alternative renewable energy, listing the different

problems and opportunities between Tidal, Wave, Wave bob, and Dam-pumped systems. Michael O'Toole , the senior engineer in Carlow County Council spoke about his work in the area of Water Treatment, highlighting the shocking fact that in 2009 48% of the water in County Carlow was unaccounted for. Ray Spain from the South Eastern River Basin Project spoke about his work which is mainly involved with implementing the Water Framework Directive (which consists of 11 different E.U. Directives) in the South East. He pointed out that the South East area (which covers approximately 1/5 of the country) has the worst water quality in the entire country because of a combination of good agricultural land and the high density of population in this area. From a global perspective, Terence O'Malley from S.A.F.E. (Support for Afghan Further Education) spoke about his work in building water tanks in Afghanistan which then allows improvement in basic health care and education to take place.

In summary, the seminars are understood to be worthwhile from an educational perspective and also to have played an important role in keeping ecological matters uppermost in peoples' minds.

### **3.2.4 Continuing work**

As a committee, we try to keep green matters in the mind of the diocese with regular updates in the diocesan magazine, on the diocesan website and by updates sent directly to each Select Vestry. In this way, we endorse websites like *Generous*, an group of Christians who promote ideas online to enable individuals to live in an eco-friendly way, by encouraging local shopping, fair trading, voting strategically, signing petitions and even marching when appropriate. They are trying to create an online

community and the following quotation from the anthropologist Margaret Meade is prominently displayed on their website:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.<sup>33</sup>

Another such resource we recommend is the *Transition Towns*<sup>34</sup> website which provides information on how people can come together in their communities to face the challenges of peak oil<sup>35</sup> and climate change.

We let our parishes know about resources and guidelines from groups like *Eco Congregation*<sup>36</sup> who can help congregations think about how to live the link between their Christian Faith and care of the Environment. We strongly recommend that ‘Green Matters’ appear as a topic of discussion on the agenda at each Vestry meeting, much as the topic of ‘Health & Safety’ currently does. We have also suggested with some success that one person in each parish be appointed as a Green Liaison person, with a responsibility of seeking out new green initiatives. All of these measures help to keep people in the diocese aware of the Green Charter and of how they can make a difference both locally and globally.

While we can still feel overwhelmed with the problems involved in this area, the attitude in the diocese that has been generated by the Green Charter is one of hope, the feeling that we can make a difference, by just tackling what we can locally and by speaking prophetically to emphasise the need for justice for those places and people

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.generous.org.uk/about/> : Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> July 2010

<sup>34</sup> <http://transitiontownsireland.ning.com/> : Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2010

<sup>35</sup> ‘Peak Oil’ is generally understood to be the moment of time when global supply of oil reaches an all time high and goes into decline. This would mean that supply will no longer keep up with demand leading to much higher prices and periodic scarcity which would have a dramatic impact on the global economy, which is totally dependent on cheap and abundant oil supply, not only for transportation, but also for food production and many of the things we take for granted each day.

<sup>36</sup> <http://ecocongregationireland.org/> : Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2010

who bear the brunt of the damage and pain provoked by our human-induced climate change.

As a small Christian community, we feel that our Green Charter is one way to begin to make a difference in correcting injustices that stand against God's love. As Nick Spencer and Robert White point out in their book *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living* :

[Churches are] outposts of the coming kingdom of God that live out the sustainable communal life that is part of that kingdom. They should be opportunities to showcase how sustainable living is not only possible but is also beneficial and joyful<sup>37</sup>

We began by living our Green Charter in our own diocese and then the decision was made to take the next logical step and to go national. As the Eco Congregation website reported in March 2010

**Dioceses of Cashel and Ossory lead way with Green Charter:**

The United Dioceses of Cashel and Ossory are leading the way in the Church of Ireland with their introduction of a Green Charter, which is displayed in all church premises throughout the dioceses. The Dioceses' Environmental Group hope to have a bill introduced at General Synod in May, which will encourage the adoption of a similar charter by all of the other dioceses in the Church of Ireland.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.2.5 General Synod

Having lived, or in more specifically Christian terms, having 'witnessed' the Green Charter for the last two years, the diocesan environmental committee brought a motion to General Synod of the Church of Ireland, held in Dublin in May 2010, which recommended that our Green Charter be adopted as a possible way forward in environmental good practice. While we felt that our Green Charter would be a perfect

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<sup>37</sup> Nick Spencer and Robert White *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living* (London: SPCK, 2007, page 175)

<sup>38</sup> <http://ecocongregationireland.org/archives/869> : Accessed 23rd July 2010

framework to be adopted by the whole Church of Ireland community, we also felt that the most important issue was to have some sort of an environmental statement and way forward agreed at a national level, or to put it more correctly, at a country-wide level –as it worth bearing in mind that the Church of Ireland straddles two jurisdictions – Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

To this end, we carefully drafted the wording of the motion and this nuanced proposal is reproduced here in full.

Motion number 9, proposed by Marianne Young and seconded by the Right Reverend Ken Good, bishop of Derry and Raphoe.

That this synod

- (i) Recognizes the need for the Church of Ireland as a whole to have an authoritative code of Environmental Good Practice
- (ii) Commends the existing Green Charter of the diocese of Cashel & Ossory as a possible way forward
- (iii) Requests the Church and Society committee to consider this and other appropriate documents and to submit a proposed code to the General Synod of 2011 with a view to its being promulgated with the endorsement of the General Synod.

This motion was unanimously adopted by the General Synod and it is our hope that the Church of Ireland, in progressing the Green Charter, can lead the way for other church communities to take our agreed gospel values to heart in the area of environmental good practices.

### **3.2.6 Theology**

The driving belief of the diocesan environmental committee has been and continues to be, that our Christianity has a political dimension and that our values need to be incorporated into the structure of the society we live in. This is accomplished by practical actions which are informed by our theology. The purpose of our Christian life is not just the devotional life of each one of us as individuals but to make a difference to the society we inhabit. In changing our attitudes to the

environment, we are repenting of our old wasteful, unsustainable ways and, no less than the sisters in Wicklow, we also are turning to a new way of living, or *metanoia*.

We hope that by witnessing with our Charter, we can speak out loudly and prophetically so to enable others to resist the pressures of consumerism and materialism which work against the drive to live more ecologically friendly lifestyles.

### **3.2.7 Opposition**

Thus far, we have met no resistance from within our tradition to the idea of living within the framework of the Green Charter although I am aware of the existence of some who view the whole area of environmental concerns as being somehow anti-scriptural, even animistic or pagan in content.

The feeling of this contingent was articulated by a previous Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey, who remarked about the JPIC process :

We have no divine mandate to create fresh theologies unrelated to the faith delivered to the saints. Some of the things I have read and heard make me wonder if I am hearing the authentic tones of biblical and historic Christianity or the tones of a spirituality which have but an uneasy connection with Christian truth.<sup>39</sup>

There are also some Christians are skeptical about the possibility to working with people of other faiths in the area of environmental issues as they view any contact with non-Christian faiths as being potentially in danger of compromising Christian truth claims. Yet as Sean McDonagh points out in his book *Climate Change : the Challenge to all of us* :

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<sup>39</sup> Ron Elsdon *Greenhouse Theology* (Tunbridge Wells: Monarch Publications, 1992, page 16)

A world of searing heat will not distinguish between Hindu, Buddhist, Church of Ireland, Presbyterians or Catholics. It will have the same destructive impact on everyone. Protecting our land, rivers and climate is one area where the churches could unite<sup>40</sup>

### **3.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed one diocese's journey to implement a framework for living in a more prophetic manner. At this stage, before expanding on the theology behind some of the points raised in this and in the case study in chapter two, two responses to climate change that come from outside the ecclesiastical world will be briefly discussed.

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<sup>40</sup> Sean McDonagh *Climate Change : the Challenge to all of us* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006, page 189)

## **4 Living Lightly : Two extra-ecclesiastical responses**

### **4.1 Introduction**

As humanity faces a crisis of advancing climate change, the general consensus is that our lifestyles should be more sustainable. Our communities should be regenerative and have the capacity to absorb crises, whether it is financial crises or changing weather patterns, and to learn to evolve with them. Communities will have to learn to be resilient, to be able to overcome the unexpected, to adapt and to thrive.

The two examples given in this chapter demonstrate how these groups have approached the possibility of breakdown in our existing social, economic and environmental systems.

One is the Cloughjordan Eco Village project in County Tipperary and the other is the Transition Towns Initiative, specifically its manifestation in County Kilkenny.

### **4.2 Cloughjordan Eco Village**

The village of Cloughjordan is in County Tipperary and has become famous for being the site of Ireland's first Ecovillage. Ecovillages is a term given to urban or rural communities of people who strive to integrate a supportive social environment with a low impact way of life. They try to integrate various aspects of ecological design, permaculture, ecological building, green production, alternative energy and community building practices.



The means by which an Ecovillage grows and evolves is best explained from three different perspectives ; Community, Ecological and Cultural, which are listed below. These are from Cloughjordan Ecovillage's own literature.<sup>41</sup>

**Community:**

Recognising and relating to the needs of the local community

Sharing common resources and providing mutual aid

Emphasising holistic and preventative health practices

Providing work by fostering ecological business ideas

Promoting unending education

Fostering cultural expression

**Ecological:**

Growing food as much as possible within the community bio-region

Supporting organic food production

Creating homes out of local materials where possible

Using village based renewable energy systems

Protecting biodiversity

Fostering ecological business principles

Assessing the life cycle of all products used from an ecological point of view

Preserving clean soil, water and air through proper energy and waste management

Protecting nature and safeguarding wilderness areas

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<sup>41</sup> [http://www.thevillage.ie/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=69&Itemid=14](http://www.thevillage.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69&Itemid=14) : Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2010

**Cultural:**

Shared creativity, artistic expression, cultural activities and celebrations

Sense of community unity and mutual support

Shared vision and agreements that emphasise the cultural heritage and the uniqueness of each community

The Village project in Cloughjordan is not just an eco-housing estate. It is a group of individuals who have set out with an objective of building a sustainable and resilient community. It is still very much a work in progress. With the planned 130 high performance homes, renewable energy for heating, land for growing food and trees, an enterprise centre and community buildings, the project is also championing community supported agriculture, exploring community currencies, introducing local democracy and governance systems and playing a part in the strengthening of the local and regional economy.

Interestingly during this study, there were some remarkable similarities in what the extra-ecclesiastical community in Cloughjordan are attempting to do and what the religious Dominican community in Wicklow is actually doing.

The second example from the extra-ecclesiastical world also shares many of the objectives of the Ecovillage although a major difference is that rather than building community from scratch, this example tries to work with what community may already exist in a given area.

### 4.3 Transition Towns Initiative

The Worldwide Transition Initiatives have dedicated themselves to raising awareness of peak oil and climate change and related issues such as critiquing economic growth. Understanding the psychology involved in the Denial – Despair continuum which was discussed earlier in the Introduction, they have come to the conclusion that it is more helpful to present this potentially distressing information in ways which enable people to feel enthused and empowered rather than powerless.

The normal process of starting up a Transition Town initiative involves the gathering together of a group of motivated individuals within the community who are worried about how their particular community is responding to the challenges of climate change.

They begin by forming an initiating group and then adopt the Transition Model specifically to reduce their carbon footprint and to prepare for the situation that will arise when oil is no longer as abundant as is currently the case. The overall plan is to engage a significant proportion of the people in their community to kick off a Transition Initiative.

All Transition Town Initiatives ask themselves the same question: ‘for all those aspects of life that this community needs in order to sustain itself and thrive, how do we significantly increase resilience (to mitigate the effects of Peak Oil) and drastically reduce carbon emissions (to mitigate the effects of Climate Change)?’<sup>42</sup>

The initiative then goes on to create awareness about the issue of peak oil, climate change and the need to undertake a community-led process in order to rebuild resilience and reduce carbon. This is done by connecting with existing groups in the community and also by building bridges to local government. They also connect with

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<sup>42</sup> [http://www.transitionnetwork.org/sites/default/files/TransitionInitiativesPrimer\(3\).pdf](http://www.transitionnetwork.org/sites/default/files/TransitionInitiativesPrimer(3).pdf) : Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2010

other transition initiatives and form groups to look at all the key areas of life (food, energy, transport, health, heart & soul, economics & livelihoods, etc).

Various projects aimed at building people's understanding of resilience and carbon issues and community engagement are initiated in the hope of eventually launching a community defined, community implemented "Energy Descent Action Plan" over a 15 to 20 year timescale.

In the Kilkenny example that I am familiar with, the initiative described above resulted in a group called *Future Proof Kilkenny – part of the Transition Town movement* whose stated aim is to 'raise awareness about the challenges and opportunities and explore how Kilkenny can make its transition to a more sustainable future.'<sup>43</sup> The focus in Kilkenny, as in other towns in the movement, is to attempt small-scale positive solutions that strengthen the community, promoting local food production and creating economic resilience.

The Future Proof events are divided into 'Head' , 'Heart' and 'Hands' categories, where the 'Head' events focus on deepening the communities' understanding of the critical issues and how to tackle them. The 'Heart' events try to make new habits and attitudes enjoyable, as one of the flyers states 'If it's not fun – it's not sustainable!' then finally the 'Hands' events are workshops that encourage the community to physically do something – grow food, produce energy, make utensils and so on.

The Transition Towns initiative try to promote a more localised, self-reliant future and emphasise that it is up to each individual within the community to make the transition. As they say themselves in their own publicity, part of the transition

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<sup>43</sup> <http://futureproofkilkenny.org/> : Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2010

process is to form subgroups who will focus on different aspects of life in the town, areas like Food, Arts, Transport and so on, stressing that the aim is not to replace the work of any existing groups but to incorporate them into a forum under the common objective of making a transition to a more sustainable future.

This has certainly been my own experience in Kilkenny as my church has been included in several activities and our own church initiatives have been advertised and promoted by other subgroups under the umbrella of Future Proof Kilkenny.

As in the previous example when the similarities were observed between the religious community in Wicklow and the extra-ecclesiastical community in Cloughjordan, I was struck by the many similarities in the approach of the extra-ecclesiastical Transition Town initiative and my own diocese's Green Charter approach.

## **4.4 Conclusion**

The subsidiarity principle that whatever can be done competently locally should be done at that level, is adhered to in both of these extra-ecclesiastical examples and this enables better local participation and makes for a more sustainable community. The examples used in this chapter also share a common response to the perceived crisis of climate change – Hope.

Hope is of course, a human virtue and not one reserved specifically for Christians but I believe that it is one that Christians are ideally placed to promote. I shall discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

## 5 Living Hopefully : the Human response

### 5.1 Introduction

The 'secular world' will attend to environmental problems because of fear and self-interest. The tragedy is that Christians have a better and more coherent motive: creation care is a task laid on the church to proclaim and for believers to act. We should be in the lead: we have a moral responsibility, which is also an evangelistic opportunity.<sup>44</sup>

There is a lot in this statement that I would disagree with – I certainly do not consider that the people involved in either the Ecovillage or the Transition Town initiative examined in the previous chapter are mainly motivated by fear and self-interest and I do not think eco-attitudes should be understood as something to cultivate in order to beat potential converts over the head with, but I wholeheartedly agree with Berry's point that creation care is something that Christians should have a heightened sense of responsibility for – the plus side of the famous Lynn White accusation you might say!<sup>45</sup>

Sallie McFague proposes that the Church should be Ecological 'in a way similar to the classic marks of the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic.' She goes on to say that ecological catholicity should not be viewed as a minor addition to

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<sup>44</sup> R. J. Berry (Ed.) *When Enough is Enough : A Christian Framework for Environmental Sustainability* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007, page 180)

<sup>45</sup> In 1966, Professor Lynn White, in an address to the American Association for the advancement of science, stated that 'We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim ... we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has not reason for existence but to serve Man'. Quotation taken from Ron Elsdon *Bent World : A Christian Response to the Environmental Crisis* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981, page 11)

the marks of the Church, it should be viewed as central to its mission to preach good news to ALL creation.<sup>46</sup>

## 5.2 What to do?

As people of faith and dwellers of Planet Earth, it is our common task to find ways to avoid a climate catastrophe. We cannot do this without hope. Theologically, hope can be viewed as a most ‘Christian’ virtue, reference the New Testament letter of St Paul to the fledgling Christian Community of Corinth, when he reminded them of the importance of ‘Faith, Hope and Love’ (or ‘Faith, Hope and Charity’ as the earlier versions of the Bible translated it)<sup>47</sup> Hope is the expectation of and desire of receiving, the means of refraining from despair and the capability of not giving up. It is vital to spread hope so that people can be energized into changing their lifestyles and attitudes so that the imminent threat is lessened. We should, on a religious level, be trying to evolve a theology and a spirituality that is sensitive to the presence of God in the natural world, to re-connect theology with what matters most in our world today.

As with St. Francis' praise-poem, *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, which brings us strongly the sense of a conscious, living Universe, St. Patrick's magnificent prayer, *The Breastplate of St. Patrick*, also expresses a heartfelt awareness of the presence of God in all, the divine found in nature:

I arise today, through the strength of Heaven:  
light of Sun, brilliance of Moon, splendour of Fire,  
speed of Lightning, swiftness of Wind, depth of Sea,  
stability of Earth, firmness of Rock.

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<sup>46</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 32)

<sup>47</sup> *The Green Bible, NRSV* (London: Collins, 2008, 1 Corinthians 13.13)

Feeling God's presence in the world around him brings Patrick to appreciate that God is in and of everything and everyone, what we would call Panentheism, which I touched on earlier in the chapter on Living Sacramentally.

Christians have, I believe, a pivotal role to play in how we can face the challenge of climate change. It is time that the Christian churches brought to bear their own special contribution, a tradition of virtuous living rooted in faith, hope and love. Traditionally Christians take the long term view, looking back at wisdom traditions and also looking forward to generations not yet born. We have to find ways to communicate our concern with regard to the crisis that we see around us. As we saw from the examples in earlier chapters, it may be that the best way to communicate is to live our concerns, either individually or more especially in community.

We can highlight the areas in our Christian thinking which point to the value of creation. We can look to our faith traditions to help contribute ways to develop strategies, symbols and also community practices which can go some way to healing the damage already done to our world. We have a special responsibility to relate to nature in a respectful and reflective way, neither exploiting nor over-using our common resources. If we have hope in God the creator of all creation, then we will see things differently and live differently and will by our witness, nurture a culture of hope to inspire others. As Robert S Gottlieb puts it in the *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*:

If religious leaders start to preach a green gospel, condemning human treatment of nature for its effects on the non-human as well as the human – it is likely to have more of an effect than statements – Religions themselves – are also at times deeply immersed with realities which are frightening. They



can also provide a saving impulse to face life – and our own moral failings – as they actually are<sup>48</sup>

Christians must demonstrate that it has an arsenal with tactics for meeting our climate dilemma. We have to mine our scriptures, go back to our traditions and look again for the earth-confirming words that exist there, for as Larry Rasmussen reminds us ‘If Christianity does not demonstrate a power that addresses earth’s distress and makes for sustainability, its claims to be redemptive ring hollow.’<sup>49</sup>

Religion forms our imaginations, and what we believe in turn influences what we do. In other words, our theological affirmations guide us in our actions. It is in recovering the central features of our Christianity, the traditions of the Creator God, the Trinitarian relationship model and the Incarnate Redeemer, that we will discover uniquely Christian Ethics that may be used to speak into the current environmental mess. God as fully incarnate in Christ confirms the material worth of all creation.

Traditional ethics revolve around what is good for individuals and groups within humankind but if we look for a Christian approach to environmental ethics, it is more the *biocentric* rather than the *anthropocentric* stance that is suggested by our scriptures, yet this biocentric approach does not take into account human responsibility for the world.

As Lynn White first pointed out 40 years ago, our human centered view of ourselves as having dominion over the rest of creation has too often been interpreted as an excuse for domination rather than stewardship and so is unhelpful to us in the present crisis. It is not just about us.

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<sup>48</sup> Roger S. Gottlieb *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, page 13)

<sup>49</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996, page 272)

O Lord, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.  
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,  
creeping things innumerable are there,  
living things both small and great.<sup>50</sup>

The biblical theme of the love of God for creation comes across most vividly in the wisdom literature, as in Psalm 104 quoted above; these verses speak loudly of the joy of God who loves all of his creation for itself in a way which is not dependent on whether or not it is useful for humans. This is the message that the WCC are trying to convey in their term ‘Integrity of Creation’ – that human beings are part of the totality of creation, the dependence of creation to the Creator and the value of creation in itself.

There are many theological views or models which are helpful in underlining the need for a culture of hope as a tool in tackling climate change.

### **5.2.1 Ecumenical model**

The WCC has consistently called on their member churches to practice solidarity with the victims of climate change by resisting the consumerist values of wealth and power which brings ecological harm to the very people who can least adapt to it. Our ecumenical terms remind us that the earth is our shared home, our *oikos*, which links to our ecumenical vision of the whole inhabited earth, the *oikoumene*. When we use the ecumenical model of the *Oikoumene*, or shared home, we will view the whole world as our home, not just as a quarry to be mined of all its resources, but as God’s household to be treated with respect.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Green Bible, NRSV* (London: Collins, 2008, Psalm 104: 24-25)

McFague speaks of how we must treat the earth as our home and not as a hotel, for if you are living in a home, you follow the house 'rules' – you take only your share, you clean up after yourselves and you keep the house in good repair for others, as opposed to hotel living where as McFague says :

One uses hot water copiously, orders from the room service menu whatever one wishes, dumps the thick, dirty towels on the floor, and heads down the road to the next night's hotel.<sup>51</sup>

When the earth is treated as home rather than as a hotel, attitudes are markedly different.

Within the ecumenical movement, major differences do exist in theological understandings, for instance between those who see salvation available in Christ as a matter for individual decision and those who see that salvation is primarily a matter of corporate or community relations. There are also those who view the Kingdom referred to by Jesus is something beyond earth and those who believe he was speaking of how we can experience the kingdom in our reality today. Christians involved in ecumenical ecological theology tend to try to subordinate or soften their theological stances to focus on their common accountability to God to nourish and sustain this world.

*Eco-Congregation*<sup>52</sup> is just one ecumenical environmental initiative trying to encourage this idea of earth as our home, the ideal of the 'whole inhabited earth' or *oikoumene*. The organization developed through a partnership between the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and the environmental awareness charity *Going for Green* (now ENCAMS). In Ireland, the initiative has been developed in co-operation with ecological representatives from the four main Christian churches – the

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<sup>51</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 53)

<sup>52</sup> <http://ecocongregationireland.org> : Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> July 2010

Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church. It provides internet resources which are available to all parishes regardless of denomination, to encourage interest in environmental issues and to offer resources and support to help them to take practical action in the context of their Christian faith. This ecumenical initiative provided many insights for the development of the Green Charter used by the case study in chapter three.

The ecumenical model could be described as viewing the earth as a shared home, a sacred habitat, where all inhabitants have to live together justly and sustainably. This model would definitely be advantageous in helping different churches to give a united theological expression of their shared gospel in terms of the current world situation rather than harking back to their inherited confessional stances.

### **5.2.2 Theocentric view**

Prior to the JPIC process, the earth was generally viewed by most Christians as something to be managed for the benefit of humankind. The JPIC initiative caused a paradigm shift in Christian thinking towards an understanding that the whole of creation had an intrinsic value. The ethical perspective that evolved from this could be termed *theocentric*, a view which was touched on earlier. This perspective is one which has a God centered view, holding human interest and the broader concern for creation together while at the same time recognising the place of humans as having special responsibilities for all others. Celia Deane-Drummond explains this further:

If we take a theocentric view as a basis for ethics then our understanding of God shapes the way we behave in a closer way than if we remain anthropocentric or biocentric ... if we believe God is radically separate from the world then our behaviour will have little effect on God. It becomes easier

to adopt an ethic to human interest alone. On the other hand, if we believe that God is fundamentally involved in the world, then our behaviour will affect God and we are more likely to adopt an ethic that takes into account the interests of non-humans.<sup>53</sup>

A Christian theology of creation celebrates the interconnectedness and interdependence of all within the Cosmic Covenant of God. All of humanity has a special responsibility to care for and protect all of the created order. The inclusion of the cosmic is called for in our traditional Christian ethical framework.

### 5.2.3 Covenantal Concept

The Covenantal view of Environmental policy is one espoused by David Atkinson in his book *Renewing the Face of the Earth* where he argues that there is a strong moral imperative towards the planet and towards our fellow human beings to do all we can to avert the damage and reduce the likelihood of global warming continuing even at the present pace. There is, he says :

A moral obligation on the present generation not to do things which will significantly damage God's earth, and which will significantly damage the planet's capacity to provide a home for one another now, as well as for our children and grandchildren<sup>54</sup>

As Christians, we must apply the hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieve the correct understanding in our creation scriptures to counteract the old understanding of dominion as allowing humankind's domination. In a similar way to the example of the Anglican response in chapter three, an ecumenical initiative called *Operation Noah*<sup>55</sup> launched in 2004, refer back to the first Covenant God made with the whole of

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<sup>53</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology* (London: SCM Press, 1996, pages 77-78)

<sup>54</sup> David Atkinson *Renewing the Face of the Earth* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008, page 18)

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.operationnoah.org/> : Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> July 2010

creation – the Noahic Covenant – to promote a way of Christian living that is informed by two important imperatives, that of encouraging urgent action to reduce emissions and that of transforming personal lifestyles to become more sustainable. Noah is deliberately chosen as a universal and iconic figure, recognised by many.

In biblical terms, when the earth was threatened by a destructive flood, he was chosen by God because he was an “upright man” and brave enough to exercise leadership and take action when others were skeptical. He was chosen to protect all of creation, not just humankind. In Genesis we read :

But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you;<sup>56</sup>

By using the biblical story of Noah, a positive, hope-filled story, Operation Noah feel that Christians in society can be motivated by their faith to care for creation and can driven by the hope that society can be transformed and enriched through radical change in their own lifestyles and patterns of consumption.

#### **5.2.4 Understanding of the World as God’s body**

The respected theologian Sallie McFague, whom I have already quoted many times, has recently put forward another model which although similar to the theocentric view, provides fresh insights into the challenges of climate change.

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<sup>56</sup> *The Green Bible, NRSV* (London: Collins, 2008, Genesis 6:18-19)

As stated earlier, the model we use is important as it is the lens through which we view our relationship with God and the world. It influences who we think we are and how we behave. McFague reminds us that :

Christianity, at least since the Protestant Reformation and especially since the Enlightenment, has through its individualistic view of human life supported the neo classical economic paradigm, the current consumer culture, which is widening the gap between rich and poor and is a major cause of global warming.<sup>57</sup>

In presenting a view, in a panentheistic manner, of the world as the 'Body of God,' she hopes to encourage a manner of increased care of, and respect for, creation. She contends that our notion of God informs our attitude to our planet and that the prevalent attitude has been, especially since the industrial revolution, one of domination and despoiling of nature. By viewing the earth as the body of the creator, life would be lived on that earth with the respect and treatment due to the sacred. She also believes that it is essential to restore hope in order to effect any change of attitude :

One of the most important forces behind behavioural change is the belief that things *can* be different, that what we do makes a difference.<sup>58</sup>

She highlights the fact that as Christians, our relationship with God is primarily incarnational, that God is with us in the here and now, in this world, and that this awareness has implications for our response to climate change. 'it means that we and God are in the same place and that we share responsibility for the world.'<sup>59</sup>

Her view of a new ecological theology is that of humans as co-creators, as partners of God, working together for a just and sustainable planet.

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<sup>57</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 85)

<sup>58</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 53)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid page 58

Much as the community of sisters in chapter two discovered, viewing the world as God's body suggests that there is only one world, only one reality and that this is a divine reality. There is no point in being dualistic, 'there is no absolute line in dividing up matter and spirit, body and soul, nature and humanity, or the world and God.'<sup>60</sup>

The idea of the God who pervades the entire universe has impeccable biblical provenance. The community in Colossae understood that

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together<sup>61</sup>

In the end, McFague decides that she would prefer to have her model 'entertain the threat of Pantheism in preference to the traditional lapse into Deism' after all, as she reminds us, all talk about God is just that – talk – and so it is surely better to 'err on the side of the presence rather than the absence of God'<sup>62</sup>

McFague's model of the world as God's body is both a theology of praise to God and a theology of compassion for the world. It stands in opposition to the traditional theology of redemption which tends to focus on sin and pain in this world and the promise of escape to the next.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid page 105

<sup>61</sup> *The Green Bible, NRSV* (London: Collins, 2008, Colossians 1:15-17)

<sup>62</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 114)



### 5.3 A case for Hope

‘Climate change, quite simply, is the issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’<sup>63</sup>

It has already been mentioned that McFague’s overriding reason for writing her latest book was that she saw an urgent need to develop a new theological model which would try and change the way we think, about ourselves, about God and about our relationships with the rest of creation. She contends that :

It is not one issue among many, but, like the canary in the mine, it is warning us that the way we are living on our planet is causing us to head for disaster; we must change.<sup>64</sup>

In this dissertation I have outlined what some communities, recognizing the seriousness of the current environmental crisis, have tried to do. How they have, acting within their traditions, attempted to tackle head-on this central, major issue of climate change.

The Roman Catholic Sisters living in community, farming the sacred land and trying to educate others into embracing a sacramental relationship with creation.

The Anglican Diocese, trying to act prophetically, by repenting of their former wasteful ways, by converting to a new sustainable way of living, and in their witness, trying to reform their entire church community to do likewise.

The two extra-ecclesiastical initiatives who are relying on each member of their community-based projects to generate a sense of communal values which will be markedly different from the consumerist ideology that surrounds them, and how they are, in some respects, mirror images of the religious responses of the two first studies.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid page 15

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

All are trying to change; all are living with hope that such a change will tip the balance for our planet. McFague reminds us that all the other issues that we say we care about – Social Justice, Peace, Prosperity, Freedom – cannot happen unless our planet is habitable.<sup>65</sup>

As the opening sentence to the 10 affirmations of the Seoul Convocation put it ‘In this world marked by injustice, violence and the degradation of the environment we want to reaffirm God’s covenant which is open to all and holds the promise of life in wholeness and right relationships.’<sup>66</sup>

It is this chaotic world situation which contains as Larry Rasmussen calls them ‘the three great instabilities of Injustice, Unpeace and the Disintegration of Creation’ that makes climate change the one single issue of our time and that is why we must all, from every tradition, all religions and none, move together to effect change.<sup>67</sup>

The desperate environmental situation facing us in 2010 makes our own lack of hope one of the most difficult obstacles we have to overcome.

On the denial – despair continuum, when we move away from denial we have tended to allow despair to overwhelm us. Danny Maguire, writing in *Ethics for a*

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<sup>65</sup> Sallie McFague *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, page 15)

<sup>66</sup> D. Preman Niles *Between the Flood and the Rainbow* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992, page 168)

<sup>67</sup> Maguire, Daniel C. and Rasmussen, Larry L. *Ethics for a Small Planet : New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, page 119)

*small Planet : New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* says that  
'Despair is the ultimate ethical apostasy. Ethics is the progeny of hope'<sup>68</sup>

My contention is that the communities I have described in this dissertation are acting from a position of hopefulness, believing that their way of living and witnessing can and does make a difference. The actions of the communities stem from an attitude of hope. It is this hope for change that allows them to remain in the centre of the denial – despair continuum believing that it is there, at that middle position, that actions are possible.

## **5.4 Conclusion.**

In this chapter various elements arising from the two main case studies were observed. Existing models or ethical stances were discussed to determine if there might be an ecumenical approach applicable to this area and how this continuing discussion might be resourced theologically.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. page 48

## 6 Conclusion

In writing this dissertation, examples of existing models were explored which may provide theological tools to enable Christian groups to take action to tackle environmental situations which at first glance seem insurmountable.

Concrete examples were given of how these models are already being applied and lived out by real communities who are responding from within their own traditions to climate change.

The contention of this dissertation is that community can provide the basis for generating the hope that is needed in order to tackle the inertia of the states of either denial or despair which is engendered by climate change. It was further contended that the ready-made communities that already exist in the Christian parish context can provide a fertile base for adopting new sustainable ways of living. This is what the extra-ecclesiastical groups examined always began with – creating and building a community – and this is what existing faith communities already possess to be drawn on.

As Larry Rasmussen says in his introduction to his thought provoking book *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* :

The warning is not to let world-weariness cut the chord of hope for this world, drain us of action, weaken faith's resolve, or substitute heaven for earth's redemption ...  
Ours is not a time for the religiously and socially timid or the intellectually fainthearted<sup>69</sup>

In other words, our task is to live hopefully in this time of climate change.

Word count : 15,168

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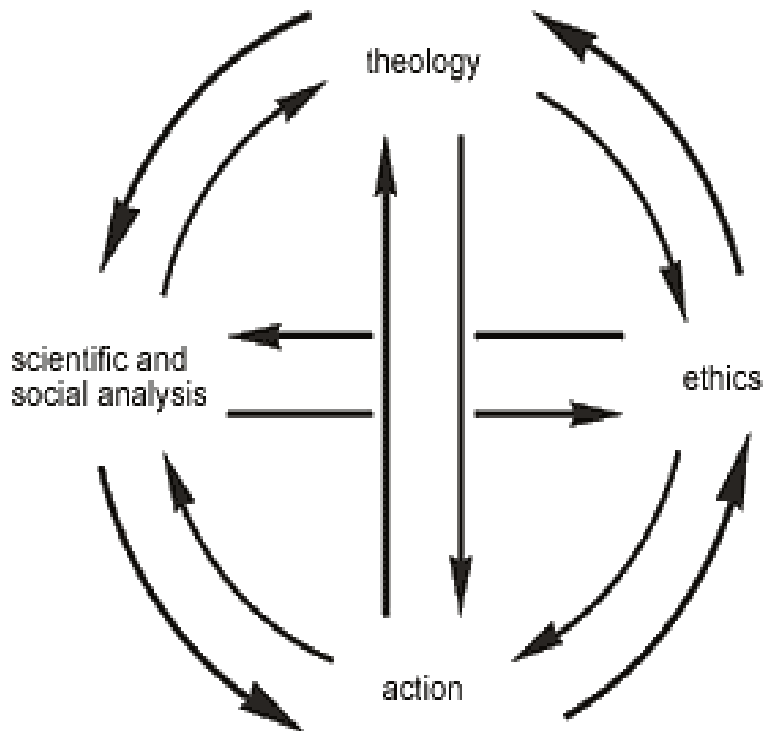
<sup>69</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996, page 13)

# Appendices

## Appendix A

### A World Council of Churches diagram

(‘The Bossey Circle’)



Reference: David Gosling, *A New Earth : Covenanting for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London : CCBI, 1992) page 65

Diagram courtesy of Counterbalance.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.counterbalance.org/ghc-out/possi-frame.html> : Accessed 21st July 2010

## **Appendix B**

### **Diocese of Cashel & Ossory Green Charter**

As Christians and members of the Anglican Communion, we have an obligation to protect God's creation, not only nationally but globally. The Diocese of Cashel & Ossory affirms its commitment to Environmental Awareness and Protection by:

- Identifying areas of waste and excess.
- Encouraging environmental consciousness in every parish.
- Promoting environmental responsibility in the broader community.
- Spiritually and financially supporting third world development, supporting fair trade and addressing the effects of climate change.
- Advocating policy change at local and national level that is environmentally beneficial.

#### **Identifying Waste and Excess**

- Turn off unnecessary lighting.
- Use heating only when essential.
- Draught proof windows and doors.
- Provide Recycling facilities in all churches.
- Identify and deal with inefficient equipment.

#### **Encourage environmental consciousness.**

- Infuse the Churches worship with references to God's creation.
- Avail of alternative energies or fuel efficient systems.
- Impress upon Select Vestries the environmental consequences of their decisions.
- Include environmental issues in the Churches education programmes at every level.
- Maintain Church environs sympathetically and cherish trees and wildlife.

#### **Promote Environmental responsibility**

- Lead by courageous and articulate example
- Cooperate with other people of faith who share these aims.
- Educate members of the public to the moral and economic consequences of inaction.
- Dialogue creatively on these issues with members of the agricultural community.
- Encourage cleaner and more environmentally responsible urban living.

#### **Support Third World Development**

- Raise awareness of the effect of climate change on the developing world.
- Support projects that assist those who suffer most from Climate Change.
- Campaign alongside Bishops' Appeal and similar agencies who work for change.
- Think seriously about how our lifestyle and carbon footprint affect the poor.
- Break the bread in solidarity with those whose future is crushed by our lifestyles.

#### **Policy Change in Church and State**

- Use the Churches councils and synods as places of environmental debate and agents of change.
- Raise expectations concerning environmental protection facilities provided by Local Authorities.
- Demonstrate to public representatives that their environmental policies matter by how we vote, lobby and act.
- Draw inspiration from the achievements and experiences of other nations and churches within the European family and seek to contribute ourselves.
- Offer informed and understanding prayers for those who carry great responsibilities in these matters.

# References

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