



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

• AUGUST 2022 •

RELIGIOUS OF THE ASSUMPTION • TERRITORY OF ENGLAND



The Burning Bush

Ex 3:1-12

This issue of JPIC news, summer 2022 tries to look beyond the denial industry of climate disinformation to what is already happening. This summer we have seen Europe on fire, glacier melts, record breaking heating in the Arctic and so on. But there are some hints as to how we can face this unthinkable, unbearable, and accelerating reality. Some are looking at what a civilizational collapse would mean, others diagnosing the cultural matrix out of which our pernicious hubris and our collective forgetfulness of unity with nature, takes its origin.

‘Life is living us now’, as Albert Schweitzer said. ‘This life and love is the only *terra firma* in a time of collapse’ ... ‘but we have the gifts of the ancestors and the stirrings of a future wating to be born’, as Joanna Macey said. So let us try to take heart, and love our times as St Marie Eugenie urged us.

Thus, our good Lord answered all questions and doubts that I could bring up, saying for full comfort: ‘I may make all things well: I can make all things well: and I shall make all things well: and I will make all things well: and thou shalt see for thyself that all manner of things shall be well.’ (Julian of Norwich)

All articles in this newsletter (except pages 7-9) have been written by Jess r.a. August 2022

The Future of Food - at Kew

It was a hot day - one of the many this summer. The grass at Kew was brown and parched. It underlined the theme of the walk, the need to encourage an alternative food system that tackles the climate crisis and ensures that all have adequate food. We don't need to be told about the heat, the lack of water which is impacting farmers and farming all over the world.

It has been estimated 3 billion people do not get an adequate diet, there is both obesity and malnutrition, though there is enough food produced to feed everyone. Certainly, a third of that is wasted but beyond that why are so many people hungry? And who is putting alternatives into practice?



Taking part in the walk at Kew about the 'Future of Food' was organised by Colette Joyce from Westminster J&P (see photo above), but the group included Tony Sheen from CAFOD and Niki Psarias from Caritas, Carolyn and I were there from the Religious of the Assumption. It was an interesting group.



As we proceeded there were placards with startling facts – *'if everyone in the world switched to a plant-based diet, the amount of land required for agriculture would be reduced by 75%.'* *'One in 3 people in the UK eat regularly on their own'*, *'more than half some staple crops are grown to feed animals for meat, 80% of all soya'* etc.

Kew is working on the future of food: this is because our foods are in danger, some from extinction, others from loss of yield because of heat and drought, loss of biodiversity – crops are now apparently 75% less diverse than 120 years ago.



Our present food system makes a massive contribution to global warming, it degrades once fertile soils, poisons waterways and leads to catastrophic biodiversity loss. There is a lack of resilience which has been shown up by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the near halting of exports of wheat and sunflower seed oil from Ukraine: four large agribusinesses control the staple food trade. Kew is identifying new food sources and crops that can be future proofed for a changing climate – one such is Enset, the ‘tree against hunger’ called the ‘false banana’, the root is edible and is resistant to both drought and disease.

Kew also helps to preserve indigenous knowledge about plants, valuing and encouraging biodiversity and encouraging a diet of plants and seeds. There was an amazing exhibition of the same by an artist making them look like attractive psychedelic sweets—if that is what you like.

We now realise that personal health and public health and planetary health are all interconnected, and improving one improves the others. Whatever, plants and fungi are vital to the future of food.

But the walk made me explore further. By mixing knowledge of nature and science, it is possible to open up a new world of food diversity; this consists of harvesting natural microscopic food, micro-organisms, air, electricity and fermentation can produce, apparently, a nutritious protein more efficiently than photosynthesis! We may be hearing more about this in the future (see Solein available from Solar Foods).

But back to the Walk. In the heat of the day, we chose a shady spot. Food is the key issue that connects people. We connected to each other as we ate and shared our picnics.

Season of Creation

The **burning bush** is the Symbol for the Season of Creation 2022. Today, the prevalence of unnatural fires are a sign of the devastating effects that climate change has on the most vulnerable of our planet. Creation cries out as forests crackle, animals flee, and people are forced to migrate due to the fires of injustice.

On the contrary, the fire that called to Moses as he tended the flock on Mt. Horeb did not consume or destroy the bush. This flame of the Spirit revealed God’s presence. This holy fire affirmed that God heard the cries of all who suffered, and promised to be with us as we followed in faith to our deliverance from injustice.



2022 Prayer for the Season of Creation



Creator of All,

From your communion of love your Word went forth to create a symphony of life that sings your praise. By your Holy Wisdom you made the Earth bring forth a diversity of creatures who praise you in their being. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. You called human beings to till and keep your garden. You placed us into right relationships with each creature so that we could listen to their voices, and learn how to safeguard the conditions for life. But we turn in on ourselves and away from our co-creatures. We close our ears to the counsel of our fellow creatures. We fail to listen to the cries of the poor and the needs of the most vulnerable. We silence the voices of those who hold the traditions that teach us to care for the Earth. We close our ears to your creative, reconciling and sustaining Word that calls to us through the Scriptures. We lament the loss of our fellow species and their habitats that will never speak again. We grieve the loss of human cultures, along with the lives and livelihoods that have been displaced or perished. Creation cries out as forests crackle, and animals alike flee the fires of injustice that we have lit by our unwillingness to listen. In this Season of Creation, we pray that you would call to us, as from the burning bush, with the sustaining fire of your Spirit. Breathe upon us. Open our ears and move our hearts. Turn us from our inward gaze. Teach us to contemplate your creation, and listen for the voice of each creature declaring your glory. For “faith comes from hearing.” Give us hearts to listen for the good news of your promise to renew the face of the Earth. Enlighten us with the grace to follow the Way of Christ as we learn to walk lightly upon this holy ground. Fill us with the hope to quench the fires of injustice with the light of your healing love that sustains our common home. In the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Climate is Impacting on our Mental Health

It was good to see an article appearing in the St Mary's University staff newsletter, 'what is climate anxiety and how should you deal with it?' There is growing evidence that eco anxiety is an increasing and significant problem among young people. This manifests itself in anger, especially at government inaction, feelings of hopelessness and depression and further, in sleep problems, increased stress levels, substance abuse and exacerbates existing mental health problems.

Young people have more at stake, they have a future to live in increasing insecurity; they often feel powerless to make change and this negatively affects their daily life. This is not something to 'snap out of'. Climate change is happening and will have devastating consequences for our planet and its people, especially the poorest.

It is important to talk about this and not to look away. A movement started in Scotland sometime before COP26, where people could gather in an informal welcoming space to talk about what they were feeling about climate catastrophe and biodiversity loss, places they knew and loved and animals, birds and insects that used to bring variety and joy to their lives.

These **climate cafes** have now spread round the country. Talking with others is of primary importance but beyond that it is



good to educate ourselves and then take action, either personal work or political action or both, but something. Action will bring hope, not the other way round. There is still much beauty in nature, let us treasure it and enjoy it while it lasts. Thanksgiving helps one to feel positive. The St Mary's newsletter urges people to seek professional help if necessary.

Climate grief is very real, the first thing is to recognise it, then express it in ritual and lamentation, if at all possible. An example of this ritualisation is in Iceland, where the local population hold funerals for the departed glaciers.

A young man, Aaron writes, 'we are exiting the stable climatic conditions that have spanned and supported the entire development of human civilization. This is a completely unique catastrophe in the lifetime of our species, unlike any we have had to grapple with in the past.' Aaron is recently married, the young couple are thinking very hard as to whether they are justified in bringing a child into the world, what sort of world would they be bringing that child into?

Growing a Global Heart



I came across this initiative through the Centre for Action and Contemplation. Here are Belvie and Dedan (photo on the right) at the 'Door of No Return' in the slave dungeon on the Cape coast of Ghana. They bear silent testimony to millions of unnamed, unsung, and unremembered lives over the many years of the Transatlantic slave trade.

Over 300 years, the UK enriched itself and many worthy people, on the backs of slaves working the sugar plantations and the selling and buying of our brothers and sisters. These days we are more and more conscious of the terrible crime committed by the slave trade, the riches from which became the base of our present industrial economy. The terrible buried shame of it is surfacing and needs to be faced. And perhaps this too is the root of pernicious attitudes of racism which are still with us. Yet 'the truth is that we are all wounded. The only question is whether we use our wounds to hurt others or whether we use them to become healers' writes Dr Cornel West.

Belvie and Dedan are African Americans. Remembering those millions who passed through the Gate of no return, they noticed the groups of beobabs where villages had once been, along the slave route in West Africa. They wanted to remember those millions and honour them. They would remember by planting trees. They were inspired to develop a project to plant a million trees along this Transatlantic Slave Route; this would be a way of honouring the past as well as celebrating the future, while healing wounds of the present and creating a more sustainable future. They called the project 'Growing a Global Heart' www.growingaglobalheart.weebly.com.

It is a beautiful vision already being realised, as tree after tree is planted even though the soil may be dry. But as Dedan expressed it, 'our tears moisten the soil of our common humanity, germinating seeds of compassion and mercy that will blossom into healing the collective suffering of us all'.

National Justice and Peace Network: 44th Conference

On behalf of the Assumption Sisters, together with Tra-my (Assumption's Young Adult Ministry Project Worker) and Christina (a student of International Politics and volunteers at food banks with Carolyn at Newman House), we had a lovely opportunity to attend the 2022 Annual Conference of the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN). The aim of this conference was for Catholics, other denominations and communities to come together to listen and discuss issues of concern in our modern age, both domestically and abroad.



This included such significant issues as peace, armed conflicts, climate change and poverty. These were scrutinised, discussed, or otherwise analysed through a series of talks and workshops throughout the weekend. I was absolutely stunned by the speakers.

To start, a diplomat for the Republic of Ireland, Philip McDonagh explored the principle of hope based on Pope Benedict's encyclical *Spe Salvi*, a statement "all serious and upright conduct is hope in action."



His analysis was, in short, that hope is a state of the mind, not a state of the world. That is, hope is a way of orienting ourselves in the world and the spirit of our hearts. Consequently, Hope also has an ethical dimension and as such, there is pragmatism at the core of its practical application. That is, the object of our love or hope can never be a matter of indifference. When it is divorced from good intentions and good judgement, hope becomes morally dangerous. Instead of being courageous, we will simply be inert, unable to act on our hope. We will not be able to act on it, as without reason we won't know how.



Mr McDonagh went on to express the view that Churches and other faith communities can become more engaged with modern life. Specifically, they should engage in dialogue with public authorities and stakeholders about local governance. This would be to start new discussions and develop new forms of leadership. He asserted that in the interests of the common good as well as global politics and diplomacy, we need to return to the roots of our culture and access a deeper level of thought that remains true to the instincts of ordinary people. As such, faith leaders need to pursue a course of more active engagement with public authorities, so that said authorities consider their perspective.

He subsequently referred to the encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI. He highlighted in that regard that the Church, although there firstly to ensure individual spiritual enlightenment, it is also intended to have a role in wider society. This includes, engaging with Western secular rationality – or at least its perceived rationality – so that we can play an active part in helping to shape the future.

Mr McDonagh's talk was both moving

and interesting at the same time and highlighted subjects often avoided in casual conversation. That includes the place of religion in a world increasingly perceiving itself to be secular, rational, and thus not in need of faith, spirituality, or organised religion.

Another brilliant speaker was Rev Dr Patrick Devine. He discussed his work in conflict management, transformation of conflicts and other peace-building processes within East Africa. He illustrated that conflict is an everyday occurrence in life and that people have different ideas, different positions, and different values. He differentiated between the scenarios of negative peace (the immediate aftermath of post-conflict resolutions) and positive peace (genuine reconciliation between former combatants) and highlighted how conflict is not inherently negative. Indeed, he rightly pointed out that it emerges from the clashing of ideas and was inevitable in any free society.

Rev Dr Devine explained and outlined why the movement from a negative peace to a positive peace is a long process. Genuine, stable reconciliation and conflict resolution require peace, justice, truth, and mercy. With this in mind, he stated "...we are not living in a vacuum". This statement makes one either rethink or think deeper about all the grave crisis's that are happening in the world. Similarly, he asked whether we were "open to forgive?" This, he highlighted, is generally difficult for us to do wholeheartedly. Conflict he warned, has a memory that is resilient and robust. He stated, to that end, that



resolution and transformation are the warriors when we are in conflict zones and concluded that: “Theory without practice is empty and practice without theory is blind.” Again, this statement is appealing in its pragmatism. The fact is that theory and practice go hand in hand and one can never ignore either.

I also attended a workshop: Universal Credit: Listening, learning, and acting on lived experience. This workshop was conducted by Paul Morrison who is an Advisor on UK Poverty to the Methodist Church. As a caseworker and an adviser working for Citizen Advice, this is something which I already have had direct experience with and have attended training in the past. However, I had not previously attended a workshop with this approach. As I thought would be the case, it was exceptionally interesting!

During the workshop, we discussed why the implementation of the Universal Credit system in practice had failed millions of low-income people in poverty, as well as other vulnerable groups of people. We saw that the poverty rate has increased, and people’s physical and mental health has deteriorated because the Universal Credit system is not helping them to live and survive.

In groups, we also explored how local churches can take action to help the system be more liveable in the short term, and radically better over the long term. We shared different opinions and understandings about the Universal Credit system. We explored its implementation in practice and agreed on its policy needs, as well as urgent changes that were required. This is even more important given the fact that since April 2022 the cost of living has risen steeply in Britain. Prices and energy bills have significantly increased.

Overall, the NJPN invited respectable speakers that fundamentally helped us not only gain a clearer, but also a stronger understanding of the ongoing issues that are happening at both national and international levels. Like Mr McDonagh said in his discussion: “it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”

It is fundamentally important that we think globally and act locally whilst keeping hope and working for peace. Undeniably, we are embarking on a journey to an unknown destination.

On another note, we also need to continue to take urgent actions to protect our common home, making positive local changes to society and the environment. We can do this by “ecological conversion”, adopting a sustainable lifestyle and saving resources as much as possible.

Amy Huynh Do

Use this link to view all the talks at this years conference: bit.ly/NJPNConference

It is Possible

Introducing the groundwork for an ecological civilization.

This is another way of understanding the world that could make all the difference based on the work of Jeremy Lent, 'Principals and Practices of Deep Transformation'.



A lot of us are aware that we are in a crazy place, wildfires, drought, floods are just the beginning. We are on course for 3 degrees of warming, which would be catastrophic. We humans are impacting life itself, we are risking the end of civilization, mass extinction of the web of life, 95% of land degraded by 2050, the threat of a terrifying future. It is verging on a form of mass suicide.

What could make a real difference? Jeremy Lent has written of the insight that culture shapes values and values shape history. What are the values of the dominant culture today? Separation of one from another with resulting competitiveness, the selfish gene, humans separate from the earth, and the search for ever more wealth and power so the earth is used as a resource rather than a living interconnected system.

So where do we start? Insights from the 'Work that Reconnects' chimes with those of Jeremy Lent – simply start with gratitude, gratitude for the living earth, the 'jewel of a planet- our only home' filled with an abundance and all forms of life. Once we can truly feel our gratitude, we will then have to come to know our pain, pain for the loss and destruction of so much beauty, so many living systems. If we can face this in the light of all that is happening around us, we may come to see with new eyes and be able to 'go forth' with hope, acting in whatever space we find ourselves.

Seeing with new eyes is also about connecting the insights of today's science with the ancient wisdom of indigenous peoples and traditional cultures; Jeremy Lent has garnered great insights from the traditional culture of China, Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Everything alive is connected. There are 40 trillion cells in our own bodies, I'm told, microscopic cells aware of themselves and cooperating as a community: trees and plants and fungi also communicate with each other in the 'woodwide web', there are networks of intelligence, dolphins talking to each other on local dialects, elephants creating rituals around their dead – wonders indeed, all alive and aware!

Science is showing that everything is connected in non-linear ways, there are fractal patterns repeating themselves and holons (smaller systems within larger systems) - the interactions between systems telling us more than the things themselves. Nature is

discovered as a self-organised, fractally connected system that has developed through increasing cooperation over aeons; competition has a relatively small part to play. Humans have evolved to be cooperative, this way we have evolved moral emotions such as compassion, guilt, embarrassment etc. We are part of an interconnected web of life which falls or flourishes together, a 'harmonic dance of life'. We need to live in reverence and care for all life and create conditions so that all humans can flourish as part of that interconnected web of life. We need to value these relationships; we depend on them. There is an emerging vision from various sources, beginning to move together.

This would be the basis for an ecological civilization - a web of relationships, a civilisation of networks of learning and meaning resulting in regeneration, interdependence, and reciprocity. If there is a glimpse of a vision for the future, a change of culture and values, this will help to fire our hope, 'For nothing is impossible to God'.

Further information: bit.ly/aboutDeepTransformation
bit.ly/deeptransformationVIDEO and workthatreconnects.org

What Crisis?

The plea for serious study of more extreme scenarios will chime with many younger climate activists, who say they are often not addressed for fear of frightening people into inaction.

"It is vital that we have research into all areas of climate change, including the scary reality of catastrophic events," said Laura Young, a 25-year-old climate activist. "This is because without the full truth, and all of the potential impacts, we won't make the informed choices we need, and we won't be driving climate action with enough pressure. For years climate change has been hidden, misinformed, and avoided and this has to stop now. Especially for the younger generations who are going to be left to deal with the consequences of years of pushing the Earth to its limits."

The climate crisis is already here, we are seeing accelerating climate change, we need to look at extreme consequences, famine, extreme weather, disease, poverty, crop failures, lack of water. 'The more we learn about how the planet functions the greater the reason for concern' Prof. Johan Rockstrom.

But what is driving the climate crisis? Yes, the fossil fuel industries, industrial agriculture but behind that, what of the human heart, the culture within which we live? Maybe if we change the lens of how we see the world another future might become possible. As civilisational systems unravel we will have to learn to live with radical uncertainty. As we confront our predicament there are the emotional and spiritual issues as well as scientific and technological ones.



Of what do we need to let go? Without these relinquishments we will not make it. A culture which determines value by monetary wealth will not survive: the consumer paradigm of wellbeing, sex, status and security will not help: 'progress' after a certain point, as we have largely imagined it, is a chimera leading to addictions of all sorts: the suggestion that 'there is no such thing as society' goes against what we are learning about our identities woven by a complex web of relationships: again we are discovering to be wrong that our natural condition is competition between us, rather than co-operation; our sense of entitlement allowing us to dominate, destroy and exploit is killing us and our world; and finally, we need to recognise that our species is not autonomous and no longer dependent on the natural world, we rely completely on the world around us and its creatures. We survive, or not, together.

There is danger of psychic numbing. Anxiety and emotional distress are normal responses to a vital threat. We need to become aware of our grief, and if we can express it either in conversations, therapies, or rituals, so much the better. Anger is part of the process, there is a journey to be made through grief. At the same time if we can manage a shift of consciousness so we realise we are part of a grand evolutionary adventure, a story of the whole universe, so we recognise we belong and are part of a council of all beings in kinship with all creatures, it will help. Holding actions in defence of the greater earth community can guide our action even in time of collapse. We will need to cultivate compassion, reciprocity, openness, and solidarity, realising present inequalities are pernicious. Already there is an interweaving of insights from so many different traditions and faiths which hopefully will continue to develop and become integrated. Perhaps at root there is the challenge of facing our fear of impermanence and death. Remember, Jesus said many times, 'do not be afraid'.

If we can reconnect with our sense of gratitude, all will be well. We do not need to have a belief in success.

To explore further:

www.carbonconversations.co.uk

www.climateconversations.org

Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA)

www.climatepsychologyalliance.org

Books

Active Hope – Joanna Macey

Deep Adaptation – Jim Bendell

