

OUR FAITH OUR PLANET, OUR COMMUNITY: NOT ABOUT TRAFFICKING OR IS IT?

Our Faith, Our Planet, Our Community at Manchester Cathedral, Monday 25 September, was a multi-faith, multi-agency, event to bring people together from different communities in Greater Manchester, to learn about climate change, promote shared values, enjoy food and fellowship and find out more about how they can contribute to Manchester's plans to become a zero carbon, zero waste, climate resilient, green and healthy city.

We were there as representatives of Caritas Salford but also because everything is linked and everything can be subsumed under the one heading of caring for our common home. If we care for our common home we care for all those in it. We care for those most affected by our complicity in allowing our lives to enrich at the expense of the poor, and in particular those most exploited individuals of all, those trapped in modern day slavery.

Our Faith, Our Planet Our Community was a message for those already tuned into environmental issues but it was also a message for the young who applaud what Pope Francis says but don't hear it echoed from the pulpit, and for those who recognise the potential of Laudato Si for community building within and beyond their parish.

After a buffet supper we sat without a break for nearly three hours, three hours which passed very quickly thanks to a multi-faceted programme of issues and practical action interspersed with music and poetry.

We heard from the perspectives of Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, and of course our own Catholic faith. But if last night was a testament to the interconnectedness of all religions, Fr Eamonn Mulcahey and Bishop John were truly ambassadors for the Catholic Faith and their thesis was the interconnectedness of all things.

Fr Mulcahey reminded us that since the 50s the population of the world had trebled to 7.5 billion and it is mankind that is responsible for the demise of countless species and for what is happening to our world generally. Yet 6 billion proclaim a religious faith. The different faiths need to work together, a sentiment that was echoed throughout the evening with the testimony that at heart we all believe in the same thing.

We have been taught that Man is conceived in the image and likeness of God and in the past that has meant to subdue and dominate the world and all within it. But there is a move, a religious conversion that can be termed ecotheology or ecojustice: the intrinsic worth of every living thing; the interconnectedness of all reality; the recognition of the mutual community or universal subjectivity of all matter - it ensures our survival and we must ensure its.

We are the stewards of the Earth and we take over from God in the continuation of creation, words echoed later from Islam:

- Waste not by excess for Allah loveth not the wasters
- We appointed you viceroys and we will see how you behave.
- Do no mischief on earth after it has been set in order.

I remember the words of Bishop John from when I first heard him speak: “This pope has grounded me wonderfully”, and that was the Bishop’s message last night. The agenda must change; the poor are important. There is a connectedness in everything and what Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si* he also says in *Evangelii Gaudium* and so too in *Amoris Laetitia*. All are linked, you cannot unravel their interdependence. And so we must be missionary disciples, the emphasis on *missionary*. Our faith isn’t just a personal thing within us we must go out and show our faith by our actions. We are ambassadors for Christ. The poor and the environment are linked. We cannot care for one without caring for the other and we must care for both. We must See, Judge, Act – not just for climate but for everything. We **See** what we are doing to the Earth. As a CAFOD trustee, Bishop John has travelled to some of the poorest places in the world, places where people live from what they find on piles of rubbish. We **Judge** that it is wrong to see waste in all aspects of our life. 7 million tons of wasted food and drink from the UK in 2012 would fill Wembley Stadium nine times over whilst 1.2 billion people worldwide go to bed hungry. We must **Act** by changing our attitude to the food we put on our plate; it is estimated that 30% of the food on our plate goes into the bin. We must Act by showing the goodness of our faith by the way we live our lives and the way we respond to the poor.

The speakers from other faiths had much to say from their own perspective but all in communion with each other. I particularly liked the Buddhist message on the evils of consumerism and the encouragement of high levels of consumption. Why is Gross Domestic Product a measure of a nation’s success when it should instead be Gross Domestic Happiness, a phrase coined by the fourth king of the Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan in the 1970s? The next speaker on Islam gave an alternative to consumerism. Instead we should Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

Above is what struck me most. There were many speakers and those at the end outlined what they could offer in support of our own practical actions to combat climate change. There was plenty of that, but compressed into half its allotted time because of slippage in the programme. In the rush it was hard to take in but we took many leaflets with contacts we can learn from when we pursue our own Parish mission to Care for our Common Home. Some things are for individual action but individual action on its own is not the main way forward. We must plan and work as a community and we must recognise and embrace the interconnectedness of all actions and of all actions within and between communities.



Pearls of Islam

Anthony Brown
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