

2010 VOYAGERS RETREAT TEACHING DAY

THE APPROACH OF THE ECO TIPPING POINT AND OUR WAY OF LIFE

I propose to start this teaching day with a session on facts and challenges to do with earth's eco crisis, and to end with the theology and spirituality that I think the situation requires of us. I don't know why I was asked to lead this day, since I am a complete layman and have no scientific training. However, just as an electorate can sometimes suss out which political party is most fit to govern, even though it has no skills in governing, so may lay people who carefully read responsible researchers, suss out key matters in an issue such as the eco crisis facing our planet.

All One is the God from whom all people come.
 One earth is the bed on which we make our home.
 One is the air that all creatures breathe.

The planet is a lump of rock - 6,000,000,000,000,000,000 tons worth – and, unlike what lives on its surface, is in no danger from climate change. The planet's human population has been static for most of history. Last century, however, the rate of increase became so rapid that it is now 6 billion, and grows by a billion each decade. According to David Attenborough's TV series *The Earth*, the world can sustain 15 billion people who live as India now does but we would require 1.5 earths to sustain a population that lives as we do in UK. It seems that the conditions that enable the earth to sustain the present population are being brought to a premature end by wanton human destruction. The human life-support services provided by our eco systems need repair. We are stretching them to breaking point. Understanding the natural world, says David Attenborough, is crucial to this.

How do we know?

There are huge unknowns in the science of climate change and there are many areas where scientists debate. There is, however, a very strong consensus indeed among the world's leading scientists about certain key points. In an effort to provide world leaders with a scientific consensus on global warming the United Nations set up in 1989 the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change. It began to gather evidence about the changing chemistry and physics of the atmosphere and has issued five reports. This now consists of more than 1,000 independent leading scientists from many nations. Despite the fact that the good science presented in their 2007 Geneva working party was manipulated until it satisfied the governments of the big oil nations, they concluded that global warming is real and that the time to act is now. They also concluded that there is more than 90% certainty that humans are the major cause. I have also consulted the material of well known and trusted communicators such as David Attenborough, Al Gore, Professor James Lovelock, Jonathan Porritt. One other thing is certain. There is huge financial gain for certain people in oil. Apply the Purity Test to those who dispute the consensus findings. If you discover that they are employed by oil giants – do not take their words as coming from independent sources.

In the Celtic tradition we take the four elements seriously. Let us zoom in on the four elements in order to grasp something of the planet's malaise.

1. EARTH

There are three great stretches of rain forest left in the world: the Amazon, the Central African and the SE Asian rain forests. These have huge long-term value for the planet. Scientists variously estimate that between 50% to 90% of all living species find their homes in tropical rain forests. When a rainstorm above the Amazon ceases clouds of moisture rise from the trees to form new rain clouds that the wind blows west to provide rain elsewhere.

We depend upon these forests for rain.

Yet every minute a section of forest the size of three football pitches is cut down in the Amazon alone. This inflicts a deadly wound to the integrity of the earth's web of life. Scientists estimate that recuperation might take 100 million years. Before deforestation soil erosion was 0.3 tons per hectare per year; after deforestation the rate rises to 90 tons per hectare. (Gore)

Deserts have always undulated: two steps forward, one step backwards, but the amount of the earth's surface covered by deserts has significantly increased in recent decades. At their edges, impoverished nomads gather firewood and graze their scrawny cattle, thus denuding the land, putting nothing back and extending the desert further. The Sahara, the largest expanse of sand on earth, is now advancing into Spain and Italy because of persistent dry years. The drylands – 18% of the area of developing countries – with their increasing populations are spiralling downwards in food productivity. These, too, could become deserts and trigger mass migrations.

What can we do?

Re-cycle paper. Buy shares in rain forest zones purchased by charities so that multi-national companies cannot buy and destroy them. Support email petitions asking governments to regulate against, name and shame multi-national companies into ceasing such destruction. Bless projects such as Norway's partnership with Guyana, whose rain forest is larger than England, to finance low carbon employment in the forests as an alternative to their destruction. The annual economic value of the forest is equivalent to US\$580, but Guyana's President has forsworn the short term economic advantage to his country because he recognises the forest is necessary to the world; estimates are that left standing they indirectly contribute US\$40 billion annually to the global economy (Resurgence Magazine January/February 2010).

2. WATER

According to a CNN investigation into water the UN reckons that one in three people do not have enough water and 300 regions in the world are at risk of conflicts over water. According to some estimates Yemen will run out of water by 2015. So-called advanced countries that do have adequate water are at risk of supplying only contaminated water to their people. Did you know, for example, that 80% of a

woman's oestrogen goes through her body and ends up in the water supply, quite apart from the vast number of chemicals used in animal feeds and crop production.

The oceans make up 93% of the world's living space, and the ocean currents encircle the world. In 2004 the international scientific community, including IPCC, realised that carbon dioxide emissions had spawned, not only climate change but an evil twin sister, ocean acidification. There is emerging consensus that the oceans are warming, which exacerbates the destructive energy of hurricanes. Most marine scientists believe that warming waters will have bleached all the wonderful coral reefs, which harbour a third of all marine life, by 2050, giving them no chance to recover (Frank Pope, The Times Eureka Magazine December 2009).

The high glaciers of the Himalayas are the water tower of Asia. They birth the world's mightiest river system, including the Ganges and the Indus. Three billion people depend upon this system. Since 1960 almost a fifth of this ice coverage has disappeared. If the present rate of warming continues Chinese researchers predict a 43% decrease in the glaciated area by 2070 though Indian Government scientists are downgrading this. 'The question of reversing the melting is one of survival' says Nepal's Prime Minister Madhav Kumar (Time Magazine December 14 2009). Two of the states that would suffer catastrophe are nuclear powers. The threat of water wars fought with nuclear weapons is real.

What can we do?

Support actions to save the seas. These must include establishing marine reserves, ending the right of anyone to trawl the seas, regulating the use of agricultural fertilisers which wash into the rivers and seas creating dead waters. Reduce the amount of detergents we send through our plug holes which wash into the earth and water systems and poison them. Talk up the use of water to provide energy.



UK breakthrough for tidal power

Source: Green Futures (December 18th)

The world's first commercial tidal plant has come on stream at Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland. Tidal power could contribute at least 12% of the UK's electricity needs.

3. AIR

The ozone layer around the earth protects it from being harmed by ultra-violet rays from the sun, which cause things like cancer in humans, and means that plants cannot remove the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere through photosynthesis. Now an enormous gap in the ozone layer above Antarctica and the Southern Ocean appears in September and October each year. The principal damage is done by chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's). They have only been produced for about 60 years. The vast increase in carbon dioxide (CO₂) produces a greenhouse effect, that is, it hots up the earth. The materialist, whether a Communist or a Capitalist, has assumed that the sky is limitless and that it does not figure in the costings of what humans do on earth. That lie must now be exposed.

The 2009 report of the U.N.'s Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change concludes it is more than 90 per cent likely that human are responsible, that unless global greenhouse gas emissions are cut there will be a rise in temperatures of more than 2 per cent which would mark the tipping point, when irreversible damage would end the lives of hundreds of millions if not billions of people.

What can we do?

Certain people may be able to explore research such as to spray sulphur gases into the atmosphere that cloud the sun and reflect its rays back into space, or to grow algae on oceans or roof-tops. Each of us can get on to the internet, work out our carbon print and reduce it to the aspired level.

4. FIRE

“There is no substitute for energy. The whole edifice of modern society is built upon it: it is a basic factor, equal with air, water and earth.”

E. F. Schumacher, 1973.

Most human eras, such as the stone age, lasted for millennia and most civilisations have lasted for over four hundred years. It looks as though the Oil Age may be the shortest in history. The human race became industrialised and rich when it discovered the temporary delight of fossil fuels. This enabled us to move from human and horse power to machines, vehicles and aeroplanes; it enabled us to light and heat work places at all hours, to create metal and drugs, and to expand from a population of one billion in 1820 to over six billion today.

The oil is now about to run out. Even during its peak discovery years, the world consumed two barrels of oil for every barrel discovered. Planes will be grounded. Shops may become empty. Hospitals and banks may close. Many will die.

God put the oil there. We learned how to extricate and turn it into energy, but we did not consult God as to how we should steward it. Even in 1999 the USA Energy

Secretary Bill Richardson stated: “Oil has literally made (USA) foreign and security policy for decades ... it has provoked the division of the Middle East... the Arab Oil Embargo; Iran versus Iraq; the Gulf War. This is all clear.”

We built a civilisation on the premise of unending growth – growth that depends upon energy. In 2001 the ExxonMobil oil giant asked the Bush White House to request the removal of Dr. Bob Watson, the Chair of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change and others. He was removed. Don't be under any illusion

In 2008 The International Energy Agency made significant downward revision of OPEC oil forecasts and said there will be a narrowing of spare capacity in oil production to minimal levels by 2013. The highly centralised supermarkets operate a 'just-in-time' delivery system. We may expect emergency crises.

What can we do?

The sun emits sufficient rays to meet the world's energy needs 7000 times over. Change to solar energy if we change our house and can get a grant.

The Schumacher College runs a 'Life After Oil' course. It proposes Tradable Energy Quotas. Everyone receives a basic ration of these free of charge. Those who want more pay for them in an auction, and pay less for energy from renewable resources.

To find out more about TEQs visit www.teqs.net

How we keep accounts

When a poor country is paid for the right to cut down 100 million acres of rain forest in a year, the money it receives is put into its annual balance of payments account. The powers that be, like the IMF, applaud it for balancing its books and lend it money to put into more developments. The wear and tear on the chain saws and logging trucks will be entered on the balance sheet, but the infinitely greater wear and tear on the forest, and on the earth, is not taken into account. The GNP treats the destruction of the environment as a good thing because it only measures what is produced, not what is depleted or harmed in the process. Much economic growth is an illusion based on a refusal to account for reduction in natural capital. In 2006 the UK Government's report from Sir Nicholas Stern, former Chief Economist of the World Bank, called for urgent action to tackle climate change: he argued that the large cost would be a fraction of the cost if nothing is done. He highlighted the madness of not factoring in the cost to the environment of production.

Schumacher's *Economics as if People Matter*, made famous by his book *Small is Beautiful*, and continued by the Schumacher Foundation and College, is perhaps the best known attempt to wean us from this illusion to reality.

The Crisis for Civilisation

So we are not talking about the ability of the material earth to survive, we are talking about the ability of our civilisation to survive what is being inflicted upon it. Al Gore relates in his book *Earth In the Balance* how significant climate changes have caused the demise of civilisations. It seems quite likely that catastrophic flooding in the Hungarian plain caused mass migrations east causing the collapse of the Hittite civilisation around 1200 BC which in turn led to mass migrations, echoes of which are found in the pages of the Old Testament. Yet such catastrophic changes took place during temperature variations of only 1 to 2 degrees centigrade.

Clare Short, Independent MP for Birmingham Ladywood, informed a London conference that there are 20 million displaced people in the world. Population growth is estimated to soar by three billion in the next 20 years placing a massive strain on world resources. Fish stocks will be wiped out and agriculture will fail, making it likely that hundreds of millions will seek to move to areas free from flood and famine. This is likely to create civil strife with fascist responses. She said 'Previous civilisations have died out. We need to change our decadent, destructive, throw-away culture and learn humility if we desire to survive as a species.' UK Initiatives Issue No. 10 www.ulk.iofc.org

Jim Wallis of USA Sojourners in Washington says: 'Don't waste a crisis. Ask "how will it change us?"' In the future, the challenge will be what it has always been: balancing human demands against nature's needs so that we begin to realise we should supply our needs not our wants. That is what lies at the heart of all the problems. Always has done: always will..

Our Response

According to Lovelock (page 11), certain regions will come out of this catastrophe better than others. The northern regions of Canada, Scandinavia and Siberia will remain habitable as will oases in mountainous regions of the various continents. Island nations that will be important exceptions to planet-wide distress include Britain, Japan, New Zealand, Tasmania and numerous of the smaller islands that are high enough not to be submerged. Is it just co-incidence that we have a presence in more than half of these places? Do we need to consult with God about ways forward?

How will we stay civilised and not degenerate into mob rule as hundred of millions from uninhabitable places migrate to these places? It may require the suspension of democratic government. It will require wise leadership and a core of people who live by the values of our Way of Life.

Part of this response may come through geo-engineering break-throughs such as Lovelock speculates upon such as producing synthesised foods, but there are practical steps that many of us can take.

Buy Local

According to the World Development Movement's Autumn 2009 Magazine the European Union imports 80 per cent of its raw materials. In order to ensure that its access to energy, metals, foods and other primary goods is not impeded its 'free trade agreements' require regulative protection of the environment, labour rights and intellectual property to be removed. It removes responsibility from foreign investors to protect the environment and bio-diversity – and in fact allows them to patent seeds cultivated over centuries by indigenous farmers. Until about three years ago the policy of governments was to globalise food production: rich countries would import most of their food because, with low wages in poor countries, it was cheaper, and previously seasonal foods could be imported from somewhere all round the year. Agriculture in a country like Britain was becoming a pathetic Cinderella. However, soaring food demands from the mushrooming middle classes of Asia, and climate change that heralds water and energy shortages, have rung alarm bells. Britain's top food academic, Prof. Tim Lang of City University, says Britain is a sleep-walking into a food crisis. Global warming is expected to hit harvests worldwide. Agriculture uses vast amounts of water: 20,000 litres to produce just one kilogram of beef including growing feed, watering the cattle, and processing the meat. In 2008 a British Cabinet Office report concluded that existing patterns of food production are not fit for a low-carbon, more resource-restrained economy. Yet we still have to pay the price of our over-use of chemicals to get a short-term boost to food production on the farms we did maintain: about half our arable land is thought to be at risk from erosion because of intensive farming methods. As artificial fertilisers and pesticides become costlier, scarcer and more hollow in their benefits, a different approach will have to be adopted. *(Based on information in Geoffrey Lean's 09.01.10. article in The Daily Telegraph.)*

This different approach must include care of the soil. It may mean more organic farming, a return of more people to work on the land, the increase in local allotments and community gardens, an increase in the number of people who eat less meat, or who are vegetarians or vegans, and a movement among shoppers to buy local. Farmers markets will be better patronised. www.bigbarn.co.uk lists hundreds of farm shops so that you can find out your nearest locally grown food shops or buy online. Churches can become markets where the produce of community gardens is brought and exchanged.

Invest ethically

The Co-op is the only mainstream bank that places green and ethical issues at the core of their business (Guardian 28 Nov 09) Triodos goes further. It actively seeks to invest into companies offering social or environmental worth. Triodos.co.uk.

Recycle

Recycle mobile phones and ink cartridges: <Recycle4Charity.co.uk>

Transition Towns Network

Helps local communities prepare for climate change and reduce oil reliance.

Examples:

- More local food growing, buying and garden sharing.
- Energy saving audits and home insulation
- Renewable energy schemes
- Increasing alternatives to mindless car use.

Contact www.transitiontowns.org WWW.earthabbey book

Sustain health through nature plots

One in six adults in UK has a mental health problem. The World Health Organisation predicts that by 2020 depression will be the second biggest cause of health worldwide. England's Chief Medical Officer has stated that being active has the same anti-depressant effect as taking tablets. We are designed to be active and to be in contact with nature. Linking health with nature goes back a long way and we need now to revive it. A thousand years ago Saint Bernard wrote 'For the comfort of sick people's pain all kinds of grass are fragrant in their nostrils. The lovely green of herb and tree nourishes their eyes... the choir of painted birds caress their ears ... the Earth breathes with fruitfulness.' This vision motivated Octavia Hill, one of the founding members of the National Trust, to establish open spaces in poor areas. The mounting evidence of the good of regular contact with the natural environment has led to the development of the Natural Health Service in England (by Natural England) and in Scotland to supplement the National Health Service. In 1998 Dave Bookless, a Vicar in Southall, was so concerned at the lack of green space in his parish, yet he noticed there was a large plot of neglected land that had become an illegal rubbish tip. They gathered grants, planning permission and a large group of volunteers, and with the help of the evangelical ecology movement A Rocha, transformed this into Minet Country Park, with wetland scapes, habitat creation, a water trail, the ringing of 66 birds, and integration with the curriculum of four local schools, holiday environment schemes, family insect safaris and the creation of a linked floating classroom on the adjoining Grand Union Canal. The late Dr. Rob Frost called this 'a parable of redemption – a sign that Christian mission is credible when it takes our theology of a Creator God seriously'.

We cannot save the planet and destroy the place. If we allow the small to disintegrate then so too, one day, will the large disintegrate. One cause of our crises is our disconnection from the place to which we belong. See *Planetwise: Dare to care for God's world* by Dave Bookless (IVP). www.arocha.org
www.livinglightly24-1.org.uk

What could become 'a parable of redemption' in an area near you?

LECTURE 2: THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHERISHING CREATION

Scripture

Our final waymark, mission, begins with the big aim – that the ‘whole created universe’ (oikumene) may be brought into harmony with God, Colossians 1.21. From this Greek word oikumene we get words such as economy and ecumenical, but its root meaning is household, or community. Paul speaks here of the entire Community of Earth which we are to view and share as a household.

Genesis 1 teaches that everything came out of nothing because its Source is God.

Creation is good and gives God pleasure.

Genesis 2 teaches that selfish actions have consequences for creation.

Our USA founding Guardian, Jack Stapleton, writes in an article excerpts from which are included in *Waymarks for the Journey*:

‘From the very beginning, no matter how one reads the first chapter of Genesis, it was always good. God pronounced "Good!" each work of creation -- and who is there to dispute the kindler of the stars? Actually, we do dispute God. From the earliest record of human musings we seem to be uneasy with matter. According to the two accounts in Genesis, humankind is the link between matter and spirit. We participate with all of creation in our materiality, we participate in the life of God in our spirituality. They're not options – to be human is to be both, to reject either is to reject both our humanity and God's creative intent. The story of the Garden in Eden is the story of an apprenticeship gone awry. The spirit/matter hybrid humans are to learn how to tend this new world. By their materiality they are tending a world to which they belong, a world of the kinship of matter. By their spirituality they are intimately related to the Creator. So long as that relationship is intact, all the wisdom of Eternity is at their disposal in the ordering of the creation. Deeply buried in all human tales is the tragedy of what goes wrong. In the Garden the humans have an option - albeit a forbidden one - to bypass their apprenticeship and grab an apparent short-cut to understanding. The short-cut, a fruit that gives the eater knowledge of good and evil without learning the wisdom of God, is the path they choose. By rejecting the path of apprenticeship with God, they've also broken the relationship of spirit to Spirit. However, not one relationship but four are broken by this act. First broken is the God relationship - they hid. Next broken is their internal wholeness - they are ashamed. Third broken, because they are now broken within, is their relationship with each other – they blame. The fourth break is the one most misunderstood. Christians and Jews refer to this as God's cursing of the earth. But in the text, God does not curse, but merely observes. God points out that now the ground – representing all creation - is cursed, wounded because of their choice. Human beings are now a parody of what they were intended to be. They are no longer at home as spiritual creatures. They are no longer at home as material creatures. All four of these breaks weave themselves throughout human history. Losing the

understanding of our kinship with the earth, we become its adversary. We no longer experience the earth as living. In our wounded vision it is an object which we may manipulate at our whim, firm in the delusional belief that what we do has no effect on us. These fractures are roots of the always contesting and nearly always dysfunctional creation spiritualities found across human religion.

Whether we destroy the earth in the name of dominion (a misapplication of the Genesis mandate) or we worship creation rather than the creator, we still miss the Divine intent. Only when we fulfil our place as the creature that bridges Spirit and matter can the creation be healed. Until then creation is vulnerable, it lives under the curse of our failure.

Yet though the earth is cursed, it is still good. At no point in the record of Scriptures does God renounce that goodness. Indeed, were matter evil, were truly fallen, it could not contain pure goodness, but that's exactly what it does. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Jack Stapleton Page 6 The Wild Goose, Vol. 16 No. 2

Romans 1:20 observes that God's nature is expressed through creation; it is a place of encounter with God, it can help us understand God better, as do psalms such as psalm 19.

Many psalms and certain prophetic passages stress that God's relationship with and commitment to creation continues: e.g. psalm 36:6; psalm 65; psalm 74:16, 17. God's Spirit fills and inspires creation, psalm 139: 7-10.

The Triune God sustains and upholds creation, Colossians 1:17. Jesus did not buy the idea that because of human sin creation lost all its goodness. He uses creation as a treasure trove to illustrate God's goodness and care in many of his parables.

God speaks to people through creation – c.f. Balaam through a donkey, Moses through a burning bush, his nomadic people through cloud movements, Jeremiah through an almond tree. In Job's trauma, when he is stripped of everything, God does not speak to him through human wisdom but through creation, inviting him to consider the mysteries of the galaxies, the wilds and the weather systems.

Luke 13:3 ... In today's terms Jesus might have said: Those billions in drought and flood-ravaged lands now sinking under the sea – do you argue that this proves they are guilty of sin? That they must be layabouts who disregard the puritan work ethic which explains the prosperity of countries like Britain and USA? No, I tell you. That is not true. On the other hand, unless you repent of your unsustainable life-style you, too, will end up with nothing, just as they have.'

Jesus is teaching that sustainable development is not an option, it is a condition of survival.

Rowan Williams

Operation Noah is a Christian Organisation which provides a focus for those concerned with the threat to the earth. In Operation Noah's Annual Lecture last October Rowan Williams said: 'The biblical picture of Noah presents us with a humanity that can never be itself without taking on the care and protection of the life of which it's a part. The story is clearly about how the saving of the human future is inseparable from securing a future for *all* living things. Noah is made responsible for the continuation of what we would call an ecosystem. The flood story ends with the making of a covenant, a binding treaty, not just between God and humanity but between God and all living things (Gen.9. 8-17): God is committed to life, to the continuance of life on earth, and whatever happens he will not let life disappear. The one thing we should not imagine is that God's covenant means that we have a blank cheque where the created world is concerned.'

Deep Ecology

Lars Verket came to Jesus and then to the Community not through the Bible or the Church, but through creation. He studied Deep Ecology, a term coined in 1973 by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. Deep Ecology treats nature with deep respect, but it regards humans as an alien presence, almost like a cancer that destroys nature. Its mistake is to write off humans as nothing but genetically determined bodies, rather than to see them as spiritual beings who are capable of relating to earth in a way that enhances rather than destroys it. It misses the point that humans and nature can be redeemed. What we need, as people like Al Gore point out, is a powerful re-telling of the story of God's placing of humans on earth and making a covenant with both to bring both to their wholeness.

The popular myth that there is intrinsic hostility between religion and ecology needs busting, for, although it is true that religions have too often joined in the general human betrayal of the earth, when they have done so they have not been true to their calling, and atheism the opposite of religion, is the earth's enemy number one.

Pope Benedict 16

In two of his New Year messages the Holy Father Benedict 16 pointed out that our present crises – be they economic, food-related, environmental or social – are inter-related and all stem from the same cause 'Twenty years ago,' he said, 'after the collapse of the materialistic and atheistic regimes which had for several decades

dominated a part of this continent, was it not easy to assess the great harm which an economic system lacking any reference to the truth about man had done not only to the dignity and freedom of individuals and peoples, but to nature itself, by polluting soil, water and air? The denial of God distorts the freedom of the human person, yet it also devastates creation. It follows' he said, ' that the protection of creation is not principally a response to an aesthetic need, but much more to a moral need, in as much as nature expresses a plan of love and truth which is prior to us and which comes from God.'" These crises, he said, 'require us to rethink the path which we are travelling together. Humanity needs a profound cultural renewal'.

Prince Charles

In his Richard Dimbleby Lecture *Facing the Future* Prince Charles pointed out that the ancient Greek word for the process of joining things up was harmonia. Joined-up thinking seeks to create harmony. This is the pre-requisite of our own well-being, and in fact of the entire eco-system. This is the way nature operates. He argued that nature grows things from the roots up, not from the sky down, but globalisation, despite its many benefits, imposes monochrome structures from the top down that do violence to nature. He urges us to look at ways of adapting so that we have globalisation from the bottom up.

Governments and the Integrity of Creation

For the first time in history a country, Ecuador, has recognised in its constitution Nature's rights to exist, flourish and evolve.... This law allows people the right to sue on behalf of an ecosystem, even if they are not injured themselves. Ecuador is small, but its example is inspiring legislators in several US states and in Kenya to adopt similar laws. (Lucy Mayhew, Resurgence Magazine March/April 2009)

Martin Palmer

Martin Palmer is the Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) In 1997 he founded the Sacred Land Project which has expanded to involve projects all around the world, preserving sacred sites from Mongolia to Mexico . In 2008 The International Union for the Conservation of Nature Congress in Barcelona "Recognizing that one of the oldest forms of culture-based conservation has been the protection of the sacred natural sites of indigenous communities and mainstream faiths, and that these sacred natural sites often harbour rich biodiversity and safeguard valuable landscapes and ecosystem" decided create an award of international status for the protection and conservation of sacred natural sites of indigenous cultures and mainstream faiths.

The IUCN and UNESCO have now launched "Sacred Natural Sites – Guidelines for

Protected Area Managers".

As a specific contribution to the growing engagement between mainstream faiths and environmental organisations, ARC launched the "Theology of Land" project this summer, supported by the Christiansen Fund, to work with faiths in defining a Theology of Land. Through this programme ARC hopes to develop a shared platform of concern and action helping to better protect the vast swathes of the world which the major faiths each view as sacred. To do this, they are inviting the major faiths to articulate their own Theology of Land.

Is this a challenge to us, with our commitment to Healing the Land, to further serious thinking and perhaps submit this to the Theology of Land Project?

Jack Stapleton

Jack Stapleton, out founding USA Guardian, has begun to do this in article in the USA Order's magazine *The Wild Goose*, part of which will be reprinted in the February *Aidan Way*. He writes of the phrase *Healing the Land*:

Though God gave the phrase through prayer, He did not give the meaning. The ecological reference was obvious; the reference to healing tied in with the 7th element of our Way of Life on the subject of wholeness; the reference to the land tied in with the 6th element of the Aidan Way on creation care. Yet even with those connections, there was something missing. While creation care is a characteristic of ancient Celtic Christianity and thus an integral part of our way of life, it is not the whole story. The phrase was perceived to be a summary statement of who we are. Thus it was essential to get into its meaning. It was a long time before things began to become clear, and by that time the phrase had faded from its prominence in the UK community as well as the US. However, that did not mean we had no hints of its meaning.

The first hint came from a Lakota pastor, Richard Twiss (www.wiconi.org). At a conference in Colorado he spoke of the challenges faced by First Nations Christians among their own people. Most of those challenges are rooted in the experience of American Indians with the European settlers, and the churches that came with them. Regardless of the intent of the immigrants the native peoples experienced a series of broken treaties, a message of religion that God would not accept them unless they lived and looked like the Europeans, and a message that their spirituality was rooted in the demonic. It's hardly surprising that today many native peoples look on Christianity as evil and dishonest and on Jesus as their enemy.

Twiss' message to the conference was that the theft, broken promises and brutality wounded not only the native peoples but the land itself. And thus, the healing of the land became more than just dealing with ecological damage, it became an issue of justice and reconciliation.

The second hint was found in a book written Russ Parker. Russ whose interest in healing had been expanding to include the healing of communities as well as of individuals. What seemed to intrigue him was the intractability of broken relationships within and between communities. Why was it that certain characteristics of conflict seemed to endure decades, and even centuries beyond the events that broke relationships? How did such fractures persist regardless of changes in leadership, and even the turnover of whole populations?

Several years of work on this phenomenon led to a book, **Healing Wounded History**. The book addressed four arenas of healing: family, church, community and tribe (nation). The book became a working text for an historic congregation in Colorado and led to the identification of patterns of behavior, persisting well over a century, that had sabotaged every period of spiritual growth and maturation. The congregation was not a unit in isolation but an integral part of a community with involvement in the history of the use of land and water and relationships between ethnic and cultural groups.

From these hints we learned that "land" meant more than soil and flora, but expressed a network of relationships between human society and the earth and creatures which were the settings of societal life.

Alastair McIntosh

Alastair McIntosh, a Lewis islander and Quaker who has worked for the Iona Community, writes in his splendid book, *Hell and High Water. Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition*, of our 'ecocidal' patterns of consumption as addictive and self-destructive. He likens our society to an addict's tragedy, and calls for 'cultural psychotherapy' (chapter 9) to liberate us. In his Schumacher Briefings No. 15 *Rekindling Community: Connecting People, Environment and Spirituality* he reminds us that the intermediate technologies that are promoted by the Schumacher Foundation seeks to humanise us and draw us into relationship with the earth. In his book *Soil and Soul* he galls us to heal the land by connecting soil, soul and society.

How to connect?

Nothing connects us with the earth – to its rivers, its soils, its creatures, its seasons -so much as food and drink.

Before we have our lunch, let us become mindful and say:

**The food that we are to eat is earth, water and sun,
coming to us through pleasing plants.
The food that we are to eat
is the fruit of the labour of many creatures.
We are thankful for it.**

**May it give us health, strength and joy,
and may it increase our love.**