

SEEDS OF CHANGE: THE NEW HARVEST

THE WINCHESTER ISSUE

by Leyla Alyanak

WINCHESTER, UK—At precisely 11 am on Sunday, 4 October, St Francis of Assisi's birthday, more than 1000 churches across the UK and worldwide joined in a new kind of religious festival linked for the first time ever to conservation—the Creation Harvest. The main service took place at Winchester Cathedral, a fitting successor to the Basilica of St Francis, site of WWF International's 25th Anniversary events last year. Throughout the day, nearly nine million people more participated in the Harvest Festival by tuning into a half-hour meditation based on the service broadcast by the BBC World Service.

At the center of the events was an original liturgy created specifically to revitalize the Victorian Harvest Festival. As Dean Trevor Beeson of Winchester dramatically turned down offerings of harvest goods from penitent pilgrims, church leaders in Kenya, Hong Kong, Zambia, the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, as well as across Britain, did the same.

The traditional British Harvest Festival took the largely forgotten habit of the Harvest Festival loaf used in the Lammas Day celebrations of the Middle Ages and gave it a modern and rather sentimental twist. The festival was once a basically romantic Victorian service, a celebration of earth and its fruits. But the romantic trappings increasingly weakened the still-popular event.

The newest changes, inaugurated at Winchester, have given a new direction and meaning to the Christian understanding of our relationship with creation and the natural world. In other words, the earlier romantic model was turned away to one which teaches good environmental attitudes.

"This new Harvest Festival evolved from the Assisi events held last year," said Martin Palmer, the liturgy's architect. "We wanted to bring home to the UK something of the excitement and drama of Assisi, the power of a really good liturgy of conservation. We also wanted to have a dramatic way in which the churches could actually commit themselves to conservation."

One of the concerns of the new festival's creators was that they would spark a one-off event which would then splutter and die out.

"So we thought, let's tie it in with Harvest Festival. And this is the first of three years of work in which we intend to turn around Harvest Festival from being a rather lost celebration of overproductivity in the farms to a repentant but also joyful and active consideration by Christians of how to care for creation," said Palmer.

The Winchester service opened with a colourful interfaith procession



Stained-glass windows of Winchester Cathedral, site of the Harvest Festival. WWF/Irene Reina Lengua

carrying forth four lanterns representing different species—reptiles, fish, birds and mammals—to the haunting music of flautist Tim Wheeler. Bahá'ís, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Taoists all moved rhythmically to the music from the back of the Cathedral while from the front, a second procession including clergy from all major UK denominations and representatives of WWF approached.

As Dean Beeson welcomed them, the Cathedral's west gate doors opened to allow a traditional harvest festival procession of 30 people to enter, bearing fruits of the earth—corn, wheat, wine and other products.

"NO. Come no further. Your offering is not acceptable in the sight of God." With these words, the Dean

stopped the procession and refused the pilgrims permission to come any further.

Using the words of Jesus, he said, "If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering."

"What he was saying," explained Martin Palmer, "was that St Francis taught us to see all creation as our brothers and sisters. We are not in harmony with our brothers and sisters in creation, therefore we have to first be reconciled to nature before we can dare to bring nature's goods into the Church as gifts to God."

As the procession stopped, the goods were left on a central table,

waiting for the moment when reconciliation with nature would take place.

Two well-known actors, Ian Burns and Mary Miller, then began extemporizing about the environmental costs of the produce lying abandoned.

"Government chemists have reported that more than a third of the vegetables and fruit they analyze contains detectable amounts of pesticide residues; one apple in five is contaminated with pesticides, some of them banned; this is the price we pay for expecting our food to look perfect in size, shape, colour and free from blemishes," they told the congregation.

They explained the evils of wheat and dairy overproduction, deforestation for financial gain, single-crop

economies, overfishing and erosion, their last words being the Letter of St Paul to the Romans: Romans 8:18-22, in which St Paul talks about how the whole of creation is groaning in travail because of our sins, in other words, how the whole of creation is affected by our lack of harmony with God, our dislocation of relationship with God, and our abuse of nature which arises from no longer doing the will of God. With these words, they led the congregation into an act of repentance with Psalm 148.

After repentance came the act of communion. In usual communion services, sins are confessed and God asked for forgiveness, with the priest giving absolution. In this case, however, Dean Beeson, although able to give absolution for sins committed against God, said the seeking of forgiveness had to go further.

"As a priest, I can offer absolution from God for those sins for which we ask his forgiveness," he said. "We shall not know if Nature has forgiven us for many years to come. If we truly repent and our lives are changed and those of our contemporaries are challenged and changed too, then perhaps we shall have been in time."

The communion service itself was entirely rewritten in this instance to draw out the conservation message. While the service was primarily aimed at Christians, meditational material for other faiths was provided in the Order of Service.

With the final prayers of the Eucharist said, the Dean of Winchester invited Charles de Haes, Director General of WWF International, to join him in launching the Rainbow Covenant (see page 5), a reworking of the original covenant made by God in the Bible in which he promised Noah, his descendants and every living creature that he would never again wantonly destroy life on earth. He set the rainbow as a symbol of that covenant.

To crown the service, each participant was asked to tie a rainbow-coloured ribbon on his neighbour's wrist, a sign of commitment to caring for nature, before being blessed and sent forth in two ways: one by the Dean, in religion, and the other by Charles de Haes, in conservation.

As the more than 1000 people attending the service filed out, they were greeted by a striking sight: the entire front of the Cathedral had turned into a billowing rainbow of multicoloured silk saris, floating across the facade in the wind, yet another sign of the interfaith nature of the service, the saris having been donated by Hindus in the UK. □

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PAYING THE PRICE

Extracts of Conference speech by Dr Klaus Michael Meyer-Albich, Senator, at the Assisi Conference, 1986.

Industrial economy has provided a hitherto unknown general wealth to some nations of the world. Unfortunately, it has brought an equally unknown destruction to the natural environment at the same time. This being so, our economy is not only to be praised for its benefits but also held responsible for the damage it has done and is still doing. The economy is free, and there is no freedom without responsibility.

Therefore, whoever appreciates economic freedom and wants to keep it should consider the responsibility as well. I care for both, freedom as well as responsibility. I am dealing more with the responsibility, however, because it tends to be neglected and this is jeopardizing freedom.

Economic responsibility is not particularly to be claimed from capitalist Western countries and from their companies' managements. The economy is ours, including everybody. Consumers and the government share the responsibility for the effects.

Consumers as well as companies, and capital as well as labour, however, tend to charge mainly the political institutions for not having prevented environmental disruption by suitable legislation. In my opinion this is argued too quickly. As far as freedom is claimed for the economic subjects, it is at the same time primarily their responsibility to consider the implications.

Free enterprise economists also tend to another simplification, namely to charge mainly the consumers. In fact, economic goods are ultimately evaluated on the market, by prices, and nobody is forced to buy something which he doesn't believe to be worth its price. Consumers' sovereignty implies saying Yes to whatever is bought.

That there is no better evaluation of economic goods than that on the market was the basic idea of Adam Smith, the social philosopher and founder of modern economics. Smith's argument was that human individuals are basically unable to decide for others what is the common interest. He considered the market as a chance to restrain human action to the limits of human provision. In fact it is already hard enough to decide how one wants to live oneself, and uncertainty grows when others are affected, beginning with children's education.

Smith expected that the market economy would be self-regulating like the planetary system. This ought to include that responsibility is taken care of by itself, like price regulations by the balance of supply and demand. This, however, turned out not to be the case, because the new market economy served the interests of some people at the price of others' losses. Smith's invisible hand was the capitalist's hand and acted in its own interest, not equally in everybody's interest.

While the aristocracy finally survived the bourgeois revolution fairly well, social injustice against the laborers became the basic problem of

the 19th century. Smith's self-regulating economy allowed some people to draw advantage over others at the expense of the whole. Fortunately, it turned out that exploitation could be met by social policy and legislation as well as by individual social commitment. Economic freedom was saved by recognizing social responsibility as going together with it.

Nowadays the economy must be reminded that economic freedom is viable only with responsibility, and once more the scope of human

our habitat in the cosmos which allows for other species' habitats as well, but we are acting as if the cosmos were nothing but our human habitat.

How far, then, does human responsibility range? In the first place, the anthropocentric answer as well as my different answer are only two out of eight.

The most elementary ethical position is (1) that one's actions are only for the sake of oneself, the rest of the world, including other men and women, being a bag of resources for one's own purposes. On a second stage (2) at least one's family and some friends are included in the scope of responsibility, and on the next stage (3) it is the nation. Most people are ethically rooted about

and when I am promising my neighbour to water his flowers I am not only accepting responsibility to him with respect to the flowers but also responsibility to the flowers themselves.

Yet I want to go one step further still. I think that in our actions we are responsible not only for ourselves, the family and the friends, the nation, all living mankind, the future generations additionally, the higher animals and all living beings for their own sakes, but for the inorganic world as well. Mountains and valleys, rivers, lakes and the oceans, soil and water, light and wind and rain - isn't all this also part of the world in its own right and not only for other beings?

Now, to consider which of these eight ethical positions is the right one, is a matter of what I call Practical Philosophy of Nature. The decision depends on answering the question who we are. The egocentric position, for instance, presupposes that one can be human without being on equal terms with other human beings, so that life without love and language is conceived to be possible.

The environmental crisis shows that by now it is not rational to exploit the natural fellow world and to destroy the natural basis of life. This present broadening in conceiving economic rationality is the transition from a social to what may be

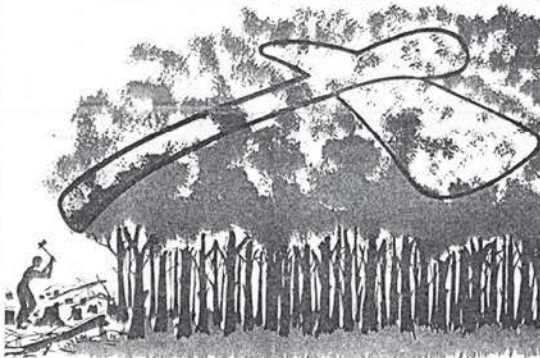
called an ecosocial market economy.

Beautiful as his ideas were, it is true that Adam Smith's economic subjects, keeping their heart at their treasures when looking for their advantage on the market, did not observe any responsibility at all, neither social nor ecosocial. If it hadn't turned out that the invisible hand allowed some people to exploit others and also to get individual advantages at the expense of the whole, we might be happy not having to expect responsibility for others from those participating on the market. The situation being as it is, however, we do not get along without expecting responsibility, social as well as ecosocial, from the market individuals. Their heart is not allowed to be only with their own treasures.

Smith's most sensible point was that people are weak in recognizing common benefits. Together with individual interests, however, he also wanted to keep out the political institutions. But if provision beyond individual interests is required and social as well as ecosocial disruption calls for such provision, it is not possible to keep out the political institutions as well as the individuals. Either the individual or the political institutions necessarily must become a subject of responsibility to prevent

(see RESPONSIBILITY, Page 8)

BEWARE! THE SHADOW OF THE AXE LIES ACROSS THE FORESTS



CONSERVE YOUR FUTURE

A FOREST DEPARTMENT PRODUCTION

A Zambian Forestry Department poster links the forest's future with that of the people.
Photo: Ministry of Forestry, Zambia

provision is to be broadened. Social responsibility, as far as it goes by now or even ideally fulfilled, does not prevent exploitation of the natural environment. In fact, in economic growth there has been an alliance of labor and capital at the expense of nature, or the whole to which we belong. Again we have gotten to a point where Smith's individuals, when considering only their private interests, are led to serve themselves at the expense of the whole so that human provision must be extended. Unfortunately, the rule that in a good bargain both sides are satisfied can be fulfilled also by both sides taking advantages over others or over the whole, respectively.

However, many would declare that human responsibility does not extend beyond mankind, at most to the yet unborn generations.

Industrial society tends to consider everything non-human as nothing but resources for human purposes. The human environment is

here, and so is the economy since there are only national economies and no global economy, which would be supposed to serve the interests of the whole.

Of course, between positions (2) and (3) further distinctions might be made, male chauvinism with respect to women, for instance. But even the next stage (4), observing responsibility in one's actions for all living mankind, does not yet reach anthropocentrism in the full sense, because (5) future generations have to be included here. We now reach the point where WWF originally surpassed human chauvinism, or the anthropocentric attitude, namely (6) broadening the scope of human responsibility to the non-human world, beginning with the higher animals.

We ought to go further, however. I am thinking (7) of Albert Schweitzer's reverence for all life, including plants as well as the lower animals. Plants, for example, live on their own right,

TERRA MATER

by Gianfranco Bologna

GUBBIO, Italy - One year after the events and festivities celebrating WWF's 25th anniversary in Assisi, the second international Terra Mater seminar, entitled "Towards the Third Millennium - What Progress?" was held in Gubbio.

The first Terra Mater seminar took place in 1982 to mark the 1800th birthday of St Francis. It was also the first meeting between environmental representatives and Franciscans. As a result of this meeting, the "1982 Gubbio Charter" was drawn up and sent to other religious leaders.

Now, a year after the extraordinary Assisi events, Franciscans and environmentalists have once again come together with representatives from other religious faiths, many of whom were in Assisi in 1986, as well as with scientists, philosophers, educators, economists, sociologists and legal experts.

Following four days of seminars, a joint document entitled "Towards the Third Millennium: Gubbio 1987" was produced. While at Assisi the various religious representatives had each produced a declaration on the relationship between man and nature within the parameters of their respective religions. In Gubbio, the declaration was common to all.

The document is made up of two parts. One deals with the inter-religious aspect and the other with the social, legal and economic aspect. In the first part, the document states that "Progress should be seen as integral, that is, in relation to all human values in their environ-

mental context, independent of politico-economical demands." Further, it says, "We must forcibly state that the economy is a means, and not an end. Economic growth is not proportionate to the increase in the quality of life. Thus, a moral question arises: is the economy intended to favour the well being and happiness of all?"

The document adds that "Could not frugality, in the sense of being detached from, and free of, possessions, perhaps constitute a contradiction and a ray of hope for current indiscriminate economical and technical development?"

On the social, legal and economic levels, after stating that "the economic growth of the human community must establish a strict limit to the capacity to support and regenerate environmental resources," the document makes some very clear statements: "To guarantee the quality of life, the safeguarding of the environment and the various cultures, we believe it is necessary to realize that revenue is an indicator of seriously insufficient progress and that current legal education shows profound inadequacies. Consequently, it is indispensable that the social sciences devote more attention to environmental and cultural values."

The new Gubbio document, produced five years after the first and one year after the Assisi events, is undoubtedly of particular importance and value. It constitutes a big step forward in the dialogue between environmentalists and the religious faiths, which, we hope, will lead to even more significant developments in this area in the future. □

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