

<http://www.greenprophet.com/2011/09/mckibben-protests-confrontational/>

We Interview Bill McKibben: Be More Confrontational

Arwa Aburawa | September 29th, 2011 on the Green Prophet blog

I speak to the recently arrested environmental author Bill McKibben, who insists that campaigners need to be more confrontational about their demands (and start wearing ties)

I think it's fairly safe to say that Bill McKibben has had an eventful couple of weeks. As well as being imprisoned for three days at the end of August for protesting against the [Keystone XL Pipeline project](#) – which NASA climate scientist James Hansen has warned could mean 'game over' for the planet if given the go ahead – his organisation 350.org recently launched a campaign to [promote green transport](#) and he is currently touring the UK. I spoke to him in leafy and surprisingly sunny Cambridge where he was giving a talk at the [KLICE and Faraday Institute Conference](#) on 'Faith and The Crisis of Sustainability'.

Fossil Fuel Industry Makes 'More Money Than God'

For more than two decades, we've had clear scientific evidence telling us that if we are serious about keeping the planet habitable we must stop burning fossil fuels. Yet all these years later and we are no closer to the elusive agreement or solution we are desperately after. Copenhagen, where the last [major environmental summit took place](#), failed to convince leading polluters to cut their emissions to the extent needed. So where are we going wrong?

Well, according to Bill McKibben the problem is pretty obvious- it's the fossil fuel industry. Making 'more money than god', McKibben insist that they have been 'drowning out the science' and blocking potential change. So in response, environmental campaigners need be tougher than they have been- they need to take more risks and become more confrontational. He explains that whilst community and local action is important, alone it isn't enough to bring about the change that we need to see.

Wear A Tie And Get Arrested

As such he sees the protests (and subsequent mass arrests) outside the White House against projects such as the Keystone XL pipeline as justified and necessary. What's more, it's the older campaigners who have contributed more to climate change and have less to lose from a criminal record who should be taking the risks- preferably wearing a tie or a dress to highlight that they are ordinary people. As McKibben adds, fossil fuel companies that are changing the face of the planet in dangerous ways are the real 'radicals'.

The Environment Is Not Just For White People

I was able to steal McKibben away from his adoring fans after the lecture for a quick chat on the environment and the Middle East. He told me he was quite surprised at the level of support 350.org got three years ago from the region when they joined 5,200 demonstrations in 181 countries in [a day of international action on October 2009](#). Jordanians, Palestinian and Israeli [worked together in a joint protest](#) whilst campaigners in countries as diverse as Yemen, Egypt and Lebanon marked the event by [highlighting the number 350](#), which is the safe level of carbon per million parts in the atmosphere.

Still, it's clear that the movement is new and developing so McKibben advises that we give it a gentle nudge in the right direction [if it strays from the green path](#). McKibben also points out that the diverse range of support 350.org receives illustrates that caring for the environment isn't a white, rich person's issue. Rather, people of all races are concerned about the future especially those who understand that it is the poor and vulnerable who are going to feel the pinch more than anyone else.

A Protest For Justice And Survival

It clear that this injustice- of poorer nations such as Bangladesh (which McKibben has visited) having to deal with the impacts of a warming planet caused by rich nations- is what keeps McKibben going. Yes, its true that some scientists say it's too late and some politicians say the odds are too high, he explains, but we must continue to fight to protect poorer nations such as the Maldives whose very survival is at stake.

And the way that we are going to do this, he insists, is by making our protests louder, more confrontational, more engaging and more beautiful.

:: Images via 350.org and [tarsandsaction/flickr](https://www.flickr.com/photos/tarsandsaction/).

Cambridge conference considers 'sustainability in crisis'

By staff writers

30 Sep 2011

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Environmentalists, scientists, educators and representatives of charities, NGOs and faith groups met in Cambridge 26-28 September to consider 'Sustainability in crisis'.

Environmentalists, scientists, educators and representatives of charities, NGOs and faith groups came together at Murray Edwards College in Cambridge 26-28 September for a conference organised by the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, and the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics.

The goals of 'Sustainability in Crisis' were to identify key sustainable and realisable policy changes for the coming decade at the levels of consumption, production and governance, and to consider means of enlisting the critical support of religious communities for these changes.

The conference sought to identify and reflect critically on the socio-economic, cultural and spiritual challenges of making sustainability possible post-Copenhagen.

A key issue was the possibility of specifying a credible meaning for 'sustainability' – for example does this presume continuing economic growth or a no-growth economy? The particular insights of various religious faiths were drawn upon, as was their potential to mobilise people behind the changes needed to address the crisis of sustainability.

The two organisations presenting the conference have close links with the Christian community, but the three day programme included representatives from other world religions and from none. The intention was not to seek a consensus across religious boundaries, or between religious and secular perceptions, but rather to engage in an honest and informed conversation about mutual challenges and the contribution religions might make in meeting them,

Drawing on the knowledge of British and international academics and expert practitioners, the conference sought to identify the policy priorities of facing a 'crisis of sustainability' and considered key issues in the following areas:

* *Consumption*: identifying the challenges, environmental and social costs arising from the current

commitment to an ever increasing standard of living. Examining the lifestyle changes necessary to reduce environmental damage and produce a better quality of life. Exploring means of enabling consumers to become environmentally responsible citizens and voters.

**Production:* identifying promising sustainable practices and examining means of communicating these throughout the business sector. Seeking to nurture sustainability among business leaders and to integrate sustainable criteria into decision making. Examining the insights religious communities can bring to the flourishing of communities and of creation.

**Governance:* Identifying sustainability priorities for the UK government's domestic and international policies and the obstacles to those priorities. Seeking means by which grass-roots and civil society support may be marshalled behind these policies. Persuading governments and other agencies to consider other measures of well-being than GDP.

The conference organisers pointed out that communities generated by religious faith can generate substantial resources for educating and mobilising millions of people throughout the world to address these issues.

They also emphasised that while religions have been, and still are, often complicit in environmentally damaging behaviour, they have the capacity to inspire the vision of a better quality of life than that offered by the consumerism and materialism of the West.

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Sustainability Feature

Shake off the apathy

Chris Walton reports from the Sustainability in Crisis conference in Cambridge last week

PAUL Chambers has been working in government in the Department of Energy and Climate Change for many years. He introduced himself firstly as a Christian, secondly a civil servant. He gave a precise, quietly passionate yet very honest assessment of government policy over a number of years, through which his own commitment to caring for creation shone through. He appealed to faith communities to assist in the task of changing society's values and create victims of sustainable living.

In the break afterwards I asked him, 'What action and interest does your own local church take in the issues of climate change and creation care?' He said, 'Oh, none at all.'

Sustainability in Crisis was a three day consultation between academics, campaigners and policy makers, representing a variety of religious perspectives and more. It aimed to provide

returned and honest conversation about the challenges we all face and the distinctive contribution religions and faith might make to addressing them.

It was hosted by the Faculty Institute for Science and Religion and the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics.



The presentations focused on the numerous challenges involved in striving for sustainability in personal consumption, production and governance in the UK and globally.

Some 20 speakers included Christians, Muslims and Buddhists, scientists, theologians, business people, a civil servant, and eco-justice activists. Christian groups – A Rocha, Tearfund, Christian Ecology Link, and secular – Friends of the Earth and WWF-UK, and businesses were also represented.

The way we have lived on the earth for the last 30 years

due to the doctrine of continuous economic growth, the resultant consumption and use of fossil fuels has damaged the earth, far beyond its ability to repair itself.

We have seen climate change, species extinction, and the finite supplies of many resources – oil, gas, coal and many minerals – are running out.

Even with the emergence of the vision of sustainability on the part of many, time is running out to do anything about it, because the vision is not matched in action. As a result, already the problems, those who have not caused the problems, are suffering flood, drought and more.

What is needed is a reshaping of both economy and society in a way which enables the earth and all life to flourish.

The conference was based on the premise that those of faith from all religions (congregation and not in their churches) can influence behavioural change, policy changes and to build bridges across national, cultural and economic divides. I can but offer a few pieces.

Paul Ekins, Professor of Energy and Environment Policy at the UCL Institute, caustically argued that, with the right policies, continual growth of real money income was financially compatible with environmental sustainability.

Ann Pettifor (pictured), well known for her part in the Make Poverty History campaign, passionately eschewed the notion of growth and argued for the need to be funded.

There was a direct link between the de-regulation of finance, credit creation and interest rate setting and rises in consumption and fossil fuel emissions, she said.

She returned the fact that the church has not condemned the use of money – and pleaded for Christians to act on the economic laws of both the Old and New Testaments which place moral limitations on consumption.

Other speakers representing an Islamic economic system and a Buddhist world view not only agreed about the delusory nature of interest, but clearly spelt out the urgent need for a single lifestyle which makes the

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Sustainability Feature



environment as integral part of life and faith.

Speaker after speaker called for those of faith to lend their voices and join the debate, to lead in sustainable living; speaker after speaker expressed the belief that faith can make a difference to how the nation and the world face destructive economic growth and change the way we all live on the earth.

It turned into a challenge to those of faith to act and to act now.

Again and again those representing their faith – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism – repeated what turned into something of a mantra. It went like this:

After an explanation that creation care was an integral part of their faith, each one contended that so many of those who held their faith either did not realize that faith included looking after the planet, or objected that it was not the way they saw it.

We all, it seems, have a long way to go, but Bill McKibben gave a public lecture in which he reminded us how little time we have.

Climate change is already well upon us, 350 parts per million is what many scientists, climate experts, and progressive national governments are now using as the safe upper limit for CO₂ in our atmosphere. Right now the figure

is 392 parts per million.

The oceans are 30 per cent more acidic than they were 40 years ago. The atmosphere is four per cent warmer than 40 years ago, which has skewed the climate towards droughts, floods and storms.

In Pakistan in the Kharber mountains 12 feet of rain fell in one week, and resulted in the catastrophic floods which displaced 20 million people.

This will not be circumstances now on. The people who suffered and died are not those who caused the problem. Don't present the face, many of the conference speakers said, it has proved not to move people into action of any kind.

Mirai did not apologise but asserted that God's people would be motivated by the revoking of repentance.

Bill McKibben believes that we only should be changing our lifestyles according to our faith, or example, low-consumption, low-carbon, localised lifestyles; not only should we be re-reading our sacred scriptures to hear the word of God for his creation, not only should be lobbying politically both local, national and international governments and institutions; but we also should be a people of justice.

It was another presenter, Ruth Valerin, who affirmed the urgent

task of returning to the values of our faith and rejecting the north-southening materialism which has taken us hostage.

Bill McKibben left us with a call to read the signs of the times. As a carrier of urgency we will need to stop destroying creation and become co-creators.

"So spacious is Christ, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and discarded pieces of the universe, people, things, animals and even we properly find and fit together in vibrant harmony, all because of his death. His blood that poured from the cross"

Colossians 1:19-20
The Message

• Chris Wellen is a Baptist minister who works at the Kingsfield Hall Christian centre in Suffolk

More information is at the Faraday Institute's website, www.faradayinstitute.com or at Faraday, the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics, www.klaio.co.uk, and at www.350.org



APRILCO Sustainable Energy recently fitted solar panels to Baptist House in Dorset. Hugh Taylor is APRILCO's business manager, and he wants that energy is not going to get more expensive.

In 2009 Ofgem predicted that energy prices would rise by up to 40 per cent above inflation to 2020, he says. The historic rise of electricity prices that time has shown that, if anything, they had underestimated the combined impact of international commodity prices for gas, Britain's reliance on gas imports and the cost of upgrading our aging networks.

It is certain that global demand is set to rise in line with population increases and the ongoing growth in developing economies.

Even so, do solar panels make economic sense? Yes, he says, thanks to the Government's Feed-in Tariff (FIT) scheme.

This scheme pays micro-generators, such as homeowners, businesses, schools or churches, both for the energy that they produce, and for any surplus energy that they export to the national grid. These two revenue streams alone deliver a typical annual return on investment of some 12-14 per cent, and in addition all electricity generated is available for consumption at the agreed cost.

The growth in the sector has seen the cost of producing the equipment needed fall dramatically, he says – and the scheme is a safe investment.

Being a government scheme and enshrined in UK law, FIT rates and feels like a government bond, and consequently has become very popular.

Granted that solar power is cheap and renewable, what about the environmental cost of actually making the panels?

Making the photovoltaic (PV) cells is relatively energy intensive. But the PV cells on Baptist House, for example, were manufactured at Sharp's carbon-neutral plant in Japan. The Baptist House modules were then assembled at Sharp's Western factory.

Is it worth churches looking at solar panels?

Whatever they can do to reduce their energy costs 'the better', whether that be through energy saving technologies and habits, through energy generation or through renewable heat technologies, for which there are also government incentives, says Hugh.

It's even possible to arrange funding. The presence of the investment funds in the market provides ample opportunity for churches to have their systems funded by third parties.

At AGE we have arranged funding for a number of schools, for example, and have even negotiated for schools to have free electricity and receive a lump sum, up-front payment from the fund in reward for energy saving technologies.

Typically, 70 per cent of electricity costs are from lighting, and lighting energy use can normally be reduced by at least 50 per cent by installing low energy lighting.

We also have experience of establishing community-funded schemes, whereby members of a community come together to raise the capital cost and then share in the FIT revenues generated.

And Hugh adds, I think it goes without saying now that we have a huge responsibility to meet the environmental challenges in front of us. The momentum for change is tangible now, and very exciting to be a part of.

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CHURCH TIMES

Listen intently and then get your hands dirty

After a year living in community at Mucknell, **Clare Bryden** offers a Benedictine perspective on the crisis in sustainability



THE charred ruins, the still-smouldering heaps, the uprights at crazy angles. . . I was looking at the photo of the burnt-out Carpetright shop in Tottenham, but was thinking of similar images of rainforest clearance. And, as the news reported that looting was spreading to other cities, I could not help but draw a parallel with our collective looting of the planet.

One of many explanations advanced for the looting is a disconnection from society and the local community. Most of us, however, are equally disconnected from our earthly home and our neighbour; we are unaware of how our food is produced, or the implications of our consumption.

One looter was jailed for six months for stealing bottled water. To manufacture, transport, store, and dispose of a one-litre bottle of water, seven litres of water and one quarter of a litre of oil are looted. It is less pure than tap water, and yet more than two billion litres of bottled water was sold in the UK in 2010.

SUSTAINABILITY is touted as the solution to the environmental crisis caused by our looting and polluting, but the sustainability movement is itself in crisis. Take climate change. In summer 2009, a global poll found that most of the people questioned — including 77 per cent of the British who were asked — wanted their governments to do more about climate change.

One year later, *The Guardian* surveyed MPs' views on climate change. Of the 650 sitting in Westminster, only 11 per cent responded, and just two per cent of the Conservative MPs. Then, last month, another global poll suggested that, in the most polluting economies, concern about climate change has fallen sharply in the past two years. Minds and hearts have not yet been won. International climate talks are at an impasse, and, unsurprisingly, carbon emissions are still increasing.

Participating in the "clicktivist" campaigns run by Christian Aid and the organisations Avaaz and 38 Degrees — petitioning governments to sign up to climate targets, stop the Canadian tar-sands oil pipeline, or think again about the sell-off of national forests — is quick and easy.

Coming together with one united voice can be powerful, but the best way to encourage change is to demonstrate that it is possible. Many responses to the looting were just talk: hypothesising about causes, demonising, calls for reprisals, and promises of government reviews. We need to understand before we can act appropriately.

And yet we must not be trapped in analysis paralysis, afraid to take the first step until the final step has been planned in detail, believing that we are powerless. The most powerful responses to the looting were practical, made by the local communities themselves (see [@riotcleanup](#) on Twitter). They understood the need to demonstrate care for their neighbourhood and maintain morale.

FOR the past year, I have been living alongside the monks and nuns of Mucknell Abbey, a Church of England contemplative Benedictine community, formerly at Burford Priory. "Living alongside" entails living within the enclosure, and participating in the daily office and most of the community's other activities.

Benedictines follow the Rule of life written by St Benedict in the sixth century; their vows are to stability, conversion of life, and obedience. Stability is usually interpreted as rootedness in God, the monastery, and the community; and conversion of life incorporates poverty and celibacy, and is broadly understood as orientation to God. As we persevere in opening ourselves to God, God will gently reconnect us.

Obedience — abandoning your own will, cheerfully and ungrudgingly, in order to follow the order of another — is, for me at least, the hardest of the vows to grasp; so I suspect that it is most worth the effort, and is the most relevant to today's world. It comes from the Latin for "listen intently": the onus is on both parties to listen to each other and to God, and to understand what is being asked.

THE Rule of St Benedict opens with the word "listen", and this is the word to which the community at Mucknell continually returns. Be silent, listen, and pay attention to God and God's word, to our weaknesses and how they drive us, to other members of the community, to our neighbours near and far, to the place where we live, and to the whole planet. Understand the effects that our attitudes and actions or failures to act could have on others.

The community moved to Mucknell in November 2010. Through listening, sustainability became a significant aim for the move: to live more lightly on the earth, in celebration of God's creation, with generosity and hospitality. It is a work in progress, but the first steps have been taken, including the construction of sustainable buildings; the installation of a biomass boiler, solar panels, and rainwater

harvesting; and the planting of coppice woodland and an orchard.

St Benedict was extremely pragmatic in his ordering of the life, recognising the value of balancing prayer, manual work, and study within the daily rhythm. Before I came alongside the community, I worked in analysis and consultancy; I was embedded in theory. At Mucknell, I have been living with the day-to-day practicalities of the renewables, getting my hands dirty in the kitchen garden, and learning about biodiversity in the grounds. I have become more connected with my food and shelter, and my environment.

With imagination, churches and congregations could replicate many of Mucknell's actions. The Shrinking the Footprint campaign and A Rocha's ecocongregation scheme have much practical advice on greening faith and lifestyles. Here is an opportunity to reconnect with each other — through churchyard work-parties to improve biodiversity, for example, or through bulk-buying of solar panels — and with God's good creation.

So I suggest listening intently to discover what actions are appropriate, and then acting pragmatically. The best way to encourage change in others is to demonstrate that it is possible.

Clare Bryden is an Hon. Fellow of the University of Exeter.

A conference, "Sustainability in Crisis", is being held 26-28 September at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge.

www.sustainability-in-crisis.org

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Churches take to the streets to press for coalition action on climate change

Christians march in Manchester on the eve of the Conservative conference to ask the coalition to live up to its promise to be the 'greenest government ever.' **Arwa Aburawa** was there.



Getting the message out: Christian climate marchers in Manchester. Photograph: Arwa Aburawa

A thousand supporters have been on the streets in Manchester for a march organised by Christian Aid, Tearfund and CAFOD. Their aim: to persuade the coalition government to work harder to deliver climate justice.

For many years, churches in the UK have campaigned to end global poverty. Now, Christian organisations are taking on climate change, on the grounds that much like the third world debt, global warming is a poverty-related issue.

Paul Brannen who leads Christian Aid's advocacy work says:

Around a billion people go to bed hungry every day and we believe that climate change will increase that number and push more people into poverty. The poorest people will be the worst hit and we as Christians need to say that we are concerned and add our voices to those calling on the government to do something about global warming.

At the heart of the Christian campaign to tackle climate change is the 'love thy neighbour' ethic and the need to protect the poor. John Griffith, a volunteer aged 71 from Warrington said he came to the event to remind the government of their responsibility to the marginalised. He told me:

What with the financial problems, I think we need to make sure that this stays on their agenda and that those least able to guard themselves against climate change in places like Bangladesh are protected.



Campaigners on the march earlier. Photograph: Arwa Aburawa

Loretta Minghella, director of Christian Aid, adds that the Christian world-view states that the earth and its resources are for everyone to share so that people can live and flourish. Yet in reality, unequal distribution of resources is the norm, she says, adding: What's more the current government is failing to meet the majority of its own low carbon commitments.

According to a [recent report by Christian Aid](#) and other [green organisations](#), the government lacks a clear low carbon transition strategy and needs to step up its international engagement on the issue. Minghella says:

In the run up to Durban next month [the next [UN climate change conference](#)], the Prime Minister needs to make sure that the [Kyoto Protocol](#) which is the only binding deal in town to cut carbon emissions gets extended. If he puts his political capital in, there is a chance that that it will happen but if he doesn't, it won't.

So far, however, the signs don't look good. The level of commitment shown by the current coalition government to extending the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012, has been poor and it is still unclear where money pledged to support poorer nations adapt to [climate change](#) is going to come from. The organisers of the 'Bearing Witness' event even struggled to secure a single Conservative minister to speak at the proceedings despite repeated attempts since April, which they call "extremely disappointing."

While the Christian community is undeniably new to the issue of climate change (Christian Aid has been campaigning on the topic for just four years), they do boast a number of influential Christian environmentalists. For example, executive director of [Friends of the Earth](#) Andy Atkins recently said at a faith and sustainability conference in Cambridge that he was 'coming out' as a Christian leading an environmental charity. He said:

I avoided talking about my faith when I first joined Friends of the Earth in 2008 as I didn't want to be seen as the 'Christian guy'. However, I do think that faith organisations need to co-ordinate and meet more regularly with secular groups on the issue of climate change.

Even so, observers reckon that there is still a long way to go before the entire Christian community really gets to grips with climate change and understands it in the same way they do poverty. Paul Brannen from Christian Aid admitted that the level of support they had been able to garner so far is small when you consider the scale of the problem. He acknowledged there are very few churches actively talking about the dangers of global warming and although he insists that this is slowly changing, the time left to take effective action on climate change is quickly running out.

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Eleanor Stoneham, PhD, Bestselling Author

“It is in our gift to stop harming our planet.” From Conscious Connection magazine, the digital magazine for 21st century cultural creatives.

<http://www.makeetheconsciousconnection.com/2011/10/a-sustainable-solution-to-a-world-in-crisis/>

An Environment Agency survey in 2007 of leading scientists and environmentalists asked them for their ideas on the 50 most important things that will save the planet. High up on the list at number 2 was the vital role that religious and faith leaders can collectively play. “Religious leaders need to make the planet their priority...the world’s faith groups have been silent for too long on the environment...” and even for those of no faith, it was pointed out that ‘Human responsibility for the future of our world calls for a reverence for what is natural that is deep enough to provoke proportionate action to protect it.’”

Whether or not we have a faith, all of us who are touched by spirit and that “reverence for what is natural” are beginning to feel unease with the current materialist and consumerist culture of the West; we hold visions of a simpler and “better” way of life, which will be more satisfying and happier.

I was in the UK university town of Cambridge in September 2010, in unseasonably scorching weather, for a Conference organized jointly by The Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics (KLICE) and the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion. Both these organizations have close links with the Christian community, but the organizers had gathered together an impressive panel of speakers from not only Christian but also Islamic, Buddhist, and secular backgrounds, all united in the desire to have an informed and honest dialogue about how between us we can face the challenges of climate change and global warming with a move towards more sustainable living.

Because Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Daoists and others already believe that it is morally wrong to damage the environment. The problem is that we often simply choose to ignore this as we go about our daily lives.

So here we were, scientists, ordained Christian ministers, Muslims, representatives of charities, NGOs, students and more, over 100 delegates, gathered together to help achieve the two goals of the conference; firstly “to identify key sustainable and realizable policy changes for the next decade, at three levels: consumption, production, governance,” and secondly “to consider how to enlist the critical support of religious communities behind these changes.”

And it was an apposite time for the debate. The American environmentalist, activist, thinker and author Bill McKibben told us on the second day of the conference that Vermont set new rainfall records recently, causing widespread flooding, washing away bridges and, ironically, small farms that were being used as showpieces of how more sustainable farming should be developing.

There is now widespread scientific agreement on the parlous state of the environment, in spite of the cynics and skeptics who would love to believe that the earth will always be able to sustain the profligate Western lifestyle as it spreads across the whole world.

Earth has finite resources and she is groaning.

Although we were left with no illusions as to the urgency of the current situation, nevertheless all who attended over the two and a half days of talks, panel discussions and question and answer sessions came away with a very positive message as to how faith communities are well placed to unite in positive actions. Because there is no doubt that the world's religions between them have enviable global networks and resources that when combined can be potent catalysts for change. And we now need to make this happen.

I cannot do justice here to the enormous scope and coverage of the conference and an edited audiovisual record of all the sessions will be available soon on the media section of the Faraday Institute website with full public access. It will also form the basis of a book in due course.

What follows are brief resumes of the many sessions, where I mention some of the pointers arising out of the event for those readers who would like a little more flavor of the conference now.

An early and vital message repeated again and again is that our economy is very sick, our economic model flawed, based as it is on growth and debt. Paul Ekins and Ann Pettifor led our first session, on Sustainable Growth. Paul is Professor of Energy and Environmental Policy at the UCL Energy Institute working on achieving an environmentally sustainable economy, and Ann is a fellow of the New Economics Foundation, and an expert on sovereign debt around the world and the challenges posed to economic policy by peak oil and climate change. What sort of economy is needed for sustainable consumption and sustainable production?

Is our obsession with economic growth feasible or compatible? Are there better ways to measure growth than RPI and similar indices? Should we take human values into account? These questions and more were posed and considered by the speakers, whose talks were then further critiqued by Tim Cooper, (Professor of Sustainable Design and Consumption at Nottingham Trent University and Co-founder of Christian Ecology Link) Mawil Izzi Dien (Reader in Islamic studies at University of Wales) and Laszlo Zsolnai (Business Ethics Centre Corvinus University Budapest). Some of the flawed assumptions of our economy are that the earth has no intrinsic value, and financial wealth and prosperity are more important than individual "well-being" and happiness.

We must also question an economy based on debt, and challenge growth as the basis for a sound economy; it is anathema to the environmental ecologist. But sadly now is not a good time to be challenging the need that is firmly entrenched in our mindset; to spend more and to carry on over-consuming! And of course usury, or lending money in return for an unearned interest, the cause of much of our current ills, is considered wrong within Islam, and again was covered in different ways by the Muslim speakers. From Laszlo's Buddhist perspective what we actually need is a "degrowth" movement worldwide, where small once more becomes beautiful.

Bill McKibben spoke with humor and passion on Sustainable Consumption. He is the author of *The End of Nature* (1989), the first book for a general audience about climate change, and he is a frequent writer in many well known, mostly American, magazines and papers, where he writes on global warming and alternative energy, and in support of more localized economies. What is the trajectory of Western consumerism? How can we overcome barriers that exist amongst individuals and communities against reducing consumption? We need to break away from the idea that a consumerist society is “good.” It has become counter-productive. There are four clear issues here, he showed us, framed around the themes of ecology, economy, instability and human happiness. For example, there is 40% less ice now than when man landed on the moon: The massive inequality gap between the rich and the poor is widening: Our financial system is obviously unstable: and the peak of USA happiness was in 1956! Most of the American wealth since then has been soaked up by ever-bigger energy guzzling houses, with negative ecological and sociological effects. Our goal, he said, must be to reduce scale, and get over the psychological barrier that always tells us growth is good!

Bill is convinced that we need an urgent 30% increase in fossil fuel costs to drive individual behavioral change and a system that privileges local level changes towards sustainability. And we need a very large number of us together to build a global political movement for change. We could make a start by supporting the campaign against the TransCanada proposed XL pipeline across America, he said.

Tom Crompton, (Change Strategist at WWF-UK), Satish Kumar and Ruth Valerio then each spoke briefly and formed the panel with Bill for the next Q&A session. Tom discussed the need to undermine the extrinsic values of wealth, prestige etc by building intrinsic values of love and unity with nature. At the moment there is a see-saw relationship between the two, and advertising is often harmful and unhelpful in this respect. Satish always speaks so eloquently; his theme was that money is not wealth: wealth is nature. Economy and ecology are essentially linked. Ruth challenged us with what the Holy Bible tells us about the four values of humility, frugality, justice and love. She was inspirational for truly and clearly practicing all that she preaches in green living.

As the founder and Chief Executive of Good Energy, the UK’s leading renewable electricity supplier, Juliet Davenport was well qualified to talk about Sustainable Production of our energy needs, and she left us with plenty to think about. What are the changes needed in the business sector to move towards more sustainable energy usage? Today our energy is still far too reliant on fossil fuels, it is undervalued and it is wasted. We need to move towards sustainability of our energy production, we need to value it, and manage it intelligently. What are the economic, psychological and technical blockages to overcome, and how do we do this?

In the panel session that followed, Cal Bailey spoke of the help that businesses need in green issues, but said that the corporate responsibility movement in big business is growing. It is important that they should be servants of society not kings. Democracy leads to short term thinking, he reminded us, and there is a need for more continuous government (this applies in the US as well as in the UK).

Harfiyah Haleem then spoke of Islamic principles relevant to sustainable production and Roy Tindle pointed out that some companies are already driving forward on green issues, citing Rio Tinto Zinc and KPMG as examples. He reminded us that Islam and Christianity had fundamental roles in developing math and science, and we need to restore that connection. We need to set up networks, do things together, to look again at how we can change behavior (very dear to my own heart). Consumers will act responsibly if they are given the information (e.g. the efficiency ratings on white goods). And churches need to help congregations fulfill their roles in their workplaces, he said.

After dinner on the second night of the conference, Satish Kumar – best known for his philosophy of reverential ecology, voluntary simplicity and holistic education – gave a welcome and engaging talk on spirituality and science – we need both for sustainable living – emphasizing that only by nurturing a love of the earth can we sustain it and live joyfully. He also told us the story of his 8000 mile walk for peace, from the grave of Gandhi to the grave of J F Kennedy, to be found in his autobiography No Destination.

Our current unsustainability is the sum of human activity at all levels, Paul Chambers told us in the fourth main session, Governing for Sustainability. We must live within our means, and we are not doing this. On our terms, this is still possible. If we leave it to nature to write the terms, then we are in for a rough ride, he said. He was speaking from the perspective of UK government, but as with all that had gone before, so many of the issues he discussed are common to all industrialized countries. He showed us that whilst there are good signs of positive change for the better, there can now be no doubt whatsoever that most global environmental trends are going in the wrong direction – depletions in fish stocks, greenhouse gases still rising, top soil erosion, salination of land, water pollution, see Living Planet report?

There is, he said, a distinctive role for the UK Government in promoting sustainable production and consumption both in the UK and internationally via global governmental arenas. There is a need for urgent global action to commit to Kyoto targets, and a need to demonstrate clearly that this need not mean economic suicide. It is also clear that we need to write a better story around the benefits of more sustainable living, with visions of a more attractive and happier lifestyle available from simpler living.

So often we believe that our actions are futile in the shadow of China's expansion. But Andy Atkins, Executive Director of Friends of the Earth, gave us cause for hope when he told us that China are interested in what the UK are doing with regard to the Climate Change Act (initiated by FoE) and are sending a delegation over to find out more. Andy urged us to do practical stuff in our own lives, whilst using our faith groups to collaborate and focus on influencing political change.

American Douglas Crawford-Brown, Director Emeritus of the Institute for the Environment at the University of North Carolina, US, has now moved to the UK, where, he says, he has cut his carbon footprint by 60% and also has a better quality of living and is much happier. He used the metaphor of an hour-glass or egg timer for our current global situation. We can plug the hole but cannot get at every individual grain of sand.

There is an American advertisement: “You have a vote; you vote 3 times a day; Change is possible.” Peter Melchett was speaking of our eating habits. He has been policy director of the Soil Association, the UK’s main organic food and farming organization, since 2001, as well as running an 890-acre organic livestock and arable farm. He gave us plenty of cause for optimism and hope, by showing us examples of where our behavior has been changed, towards a more organic lifestyle. We are in the grip of a false assumption, he said, that we cannot control our current food situation – that cheaper foods, less wildlife, lower animal welfare, lower nutritional content, are inevitable consequences of our need to feed a growing world population. A sound ecological system can feed the world, and organic farming is a significant part of that model.

A UN initiated report, not reported widely enough, shows us that organic farming can feed the world. We don’t need factory farming. We can change our food culture, change our shopping habits, educate the young in good food, show them how to grow it themselves. He had huge success stories to tell, starting with essential work in schools, changing the school meal environment.

Religion and Sustainability in Global Perspective, our final session, was led by Fazlun Khalid and Elaine Storkey. Both emphasized that global religions can make key contributions to the current crisis, so what are they doing now? How can they be more effective? Fazlun left us with plenty of food for thought with his models and templates for sustainability within Islamic principles, and with his very clear explanation of the dangers of debt and fiat money.

Elaine Storkey told us that the full significance and value of religion for addressing our current climate and sustainability issues has not really been properly explored or exploited (although this is not to say that much good work is not being done by faith groups in this regard). Reasons for this she gave as absence in the public sphere (although this is changing), apathy towards organized religions from the secular population, antagonism from the media and attack from strident atheists, some at best disrespectful, at worst insulting. So what can be done? Firstly, offer a spiritual dimension in secular debates, she suggested. Then supplement this; by making individual contributions as believers: drawing attention to the disproportionate effects of climate change on the poorest and most vulnerable: engaging in critical dialogue with culture from a faith perspective: make full use of hospitality and resources: re-address the education of the young (Oxfam has plenty of resources for schools on Climate Change – we only have to ask): mobilize our own global forces, coordinating strategies, sharing intelligence, setting up small regular campaigns: and celebrate our differences.

Share faith, trust, hope, respect and love, never forgetting that we are all human, we are all the same.

There is always a risk with conferences that much is discussed, but very little then happens. I am guilty myself. But I was impressed with the motivation inspired by this event in Cambridge, and am hopeful that many of the delegates truly will be going away to generate action. I certainly intend to, and as a part of this commitment hope to put up rather more of the conference ideas, with my own actions, on my blog from time to time. All of us reading this could perhaps commit now to some practical

change in our lives that will be the start of our very own ripples towards a more sustainable future?

Note: A previous Faraday Institute initiative in 2008, with the John Ray Initiative, addressed the issue of “The Root Causes of Unsustainability.” This is now published as *Creation in Crisis: Christian Perspectives on Sustainability* (Robert S. White, ed., SPCK 2009)

Lessons on sustainable living, with the green monks of Mucknell

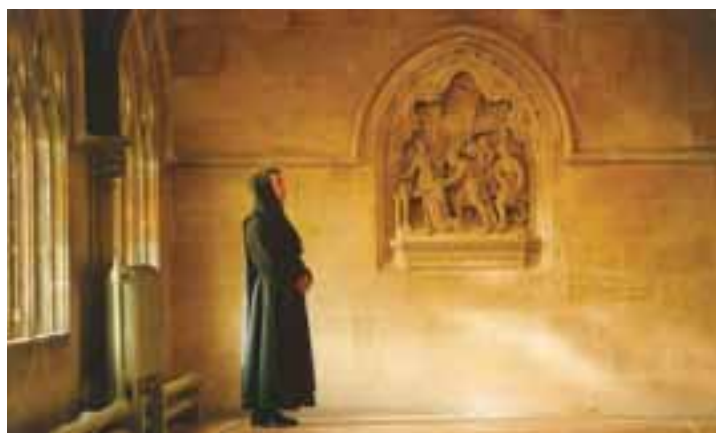
Spending a year with Benedictine monks has taught me how to cultivate a healthy environmental idealism rooted in reality



Clare Bryden

guardian.co.uk, Thursday 15 September 2011 18.30 BST

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Benedictine idealism is 'rooted in the present reality and oriented in hope to values such as hospitality, compassion and generosity to others'. Photograph: Rob Cousins/Alamy

Sustainability is touted as the solution to the environmental crisis, but is the sustainability movement running out of steam and itself in crisis? Take for example [climate change](#). Back in the summer of 2009, a global poll found that most people, including 77% of Britons, wanted their governments to do more about climate change. But in August, another global poll found that in the biggest most-polluting economies, concern about climate change had fallen sharply in the last two years. Minds and hearts have not yet been won. International climate talks are at an impasse and, unsurprisingly, carbon emissions are still increasing.

Perhaps those in the sustainability movement has focused too much on publicising their protests and pledges, but digging deeper, I find they are also providing constructive policy input and concrete results. [38 Degrees did not just co-ordinate the successful campaign](#) to prevent the sell-off of the national forests, but continues to co-ordinate and provide advice to the government. One year on from the buzz and the pledges to reduce carbon by 10% in 2010, the [10:10 campaign](#) is able to report actual reductions in emissions. And there are many relatively hidden positive things happening among the grass roots; I recently spent a happy hour or two with friends discussing sustainable initiatives in Devon, often linked with the [transition movement](#).

This more self-effacing commitment to sustainability reflects many people's willingness to imagine a better future and the effective first steps they have taken to realising it. In the media we read about the actions of MPs, bankers, journalists, prime ministers and police. There are acres of newsprint and online content about the

possible underlying causes of the looting, and hand-wringing about our broken society, our self-centredness and cynicism. But across the country there are hidden millions of people who don't necessarily rationalise the sociological causes and effects, or whether they are motivated by idealism, but just roll up their sleeves and get on with it because they want to make their community a better place (think [@riotcleanup](#)).

For the past year, I have been living alongside the monks and nuns of Mucknell Abbey, a contemplative Benedictine community in the Church of England. There are few more hidden lifestyles, but they have precious insights to offer the instinctive idealist.

Benedictines follow the rule of life written by [St Benedict in the 6th century](#). Their vows are to stability, conversion of life and obedience. Stability is usually interpreted as commitment to the place and to each other. Conversion of life incorporates poverty and celibacy, but is more broadly understood as orientation to God. Obedience – the willingness to put aside one's own concerns and abandon one's own will, cheerfully and ungrudgingly, in order to follow the order of another – is, for me at least, the hardest of the vows to grasp. So I suspect that it is most worth the effort to grasp and is the most relevant to today's world. It comes from the Latin for "listen intently".

The onus is on both parties to listen to each other and to God, and to understand what is being asked. In fact, the Rule of Benedict opens with the word "listen". This is the word to which the community at Mucknell continually returns. Listen and pay attention, to God and God's word, to our weaknesses and how they drive us, to other members of the community, to our neighbours near and far, to the place where we live, to the whole planet. Understand the effects our attitudes and actions could have on others.

Benedict was extremely practical in his ordering of the life. He recognised the value of balancing prayer, manual work and study within the daily rhythm. Before I came alongside the community, I worked in analysis and consultancy; I was embedded in theory. At Mucknell, I have been living with the day-to-day practicalities of renewable energy and rainwater harvesting, getting my hands dirty in the kitchen garden and learning about the diversity of nature in the grounds. As a result, I am more connected with my food and shelter and my environment.

Community life can be idealised by newcomers, but they are rapidly disabused. Nuns and monks are real people, who live together at close quarters and who quickly get to know each other's idiosyncrasies. Benedict was well aware of our individual weaknesses, and permeated his rule with moderation. So this dewy-eyed idealism needs to give way to a healthy idealism both rooted in the present reality and oriented in hope to values such as hospitality, compassion and generosity to others; growth into the image of God; and sustainability, both physical and spiritual. The Benedictine order has flourished for nearly 1,500 years, and should be a sustaining presence for years to come.

• *The Sustainability in Crisis conference runs from 26-28 September 2011, at Murray Edwards College in Cambridge.*

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Safe spaces



Rosemary Randall is a psychotherapist, founder of the community-based charity Cambridge Carbon Footprint and the nationally acclaimed Carbon Conversations project. Her work brings insights from psychotherapy to work on climate change and she writes and lectures widely on the psychological dimensions of the public response to the issue. Links to her work can be found on her [website](#).

The idea of the 'safe space' is crucial to psychotherapy. What relevance does it have to climate change?

Many people find it hard to accept the reality of climate change and the need for both urgent action and widespread socio-political change. This is often an emotional rather than an intellectual problem: climate change threatens much that people hold dear. 'Safe spaces' where people can come to terms with what may happen, the changes that are needed and their own feelings about it can be crucial in helping them take action both in their personal lives and politically, as citizens.

In psychotherapy the safe space is created by the therapist who initiates a relationship that:

- Is non-judgmental and offers tolerance and respect
- Accepts the complexity and strength of feelings
- Embodies belief in the possibility of change and development
- Offers challenge as well as support
- Encourages and trusts in people's creativity

The 'safe space' is not one which feels cosy but one which allows creativity and change to occur. It is safe enough to think, to feel, to question, to become uncomfortable, to be upset, to argue, fall out, make up and survive. If the safe space becomes merely comforting or self-congratulatory it is not doing its job.

The relevance for this to climate change relates to the fact that people do not change their opinions or adopt new behaviours through being given information or being put under pressure. Information on its own doesn't work. Telling, arguing, shocking or bludgeoning just don't do it. What does help is creating situations where people can reflect and get in touch with their own conflicting feelings, motivations and creativity. Creating situations that draw on the idea of the 'safe space' can lead to some interesting outcomes.

Examples

In my work for the charity Cambridge Carbon Footprint, the idea of the 'safe space' lay behind the Carbon Footprint interviews we conducted with over 2500 people in the City between 2005 and 2008. 32 questions about their home, their travel, the money they spent and the food they ate took people quickly to the heart of their carbon-dependent lives.

Although an answer emerged at the end which told people where they stood in relation to the national average footprint, the point was the conversation that took place. Training the interviewers to make this a non-judgmental, exploratory, welcoming experience was key.

My subsequent work has continued this emphasis on safe spaces.

Training volunteers in personal communications skills helps them judge quickly how a climate change conversation is going, alerts them to the subtle resistances that people bring to difficult subjects and helps them offer appropriate support and challenges. **Carbon Conversations**, a

scheme now organised nationally by **COIN**, brings people together in small facilitated groups to share their responses to climate change and explore how to make major reductions to their carbon footprints. Again, it's the creation of the safe, responsive space which is key to the success of these groups.

Safe spaces are not unique to psychotherapy. They can be found in many other contexts and can occur spontaneously where people trust each other enough to open themselves to new ideas and possibilities. Sharing values is often key and I experienced a good example of this at the recent **Sustainability in Crisis** conference in Cambridge. This was a conference of people from faith groups, primarily Christians, and so it had the ease of understanding and acceptance that comes when people know that their basic premises about life are likely to be affirmed and understood by others. Into this conference, (which like many meetings of like minds carried a risk of cosiness) flew **Bill McKibben**, the US environmentalist and activist, fresh from cooling his heels in a Washington clink, having been arrested during a demonstration about the planned oil pipeline from Canada. Warm, engaging, sharp and inspiring, McKibben embodied the creative challenge that the safe space both needs and makes possible. McKibben was uncompromising in his argument that the additive process of individual action won't work. Political engagement is critical. He reminded his audience of the origins of non-violent direct action in the Christian tradition and encouraged them to stand up, take part and risk arrest. Conversations over coffee and supper were testament to the way he pitched his challenge but it was the context of the safe space that made it possible for him to be properly heard.

Politics and campaigning

In more directly political work the tension between the need to challenge

and the need for a safe space can be tricky. Confrontation, uncompromising demands and irresistible pressure on those in power are necessary. The clue is to think about who needs to be confronted and who needs to be safe. There is often a dual audience, those in power who need to be challenged and a potentially sympathetic public who need to be engaged and encouraged to come on side and take part. **Climate Rush** with their mix of humour, drama and surprise is one group who seem to have a good balance of confronting those in power without alienating those who witness their demonstrations. **Occupy London** seem similarly well positioned in engaging the public while causing grave discomfort to those in power. Bill McKibben's plea was for climate protestors to abandon the polar bear outfits and come dressed in respectable suits in order to demonstrate visually to the powerful that this is a protest of mainstream opinion and to mainstream opinion that here is a protest they can identify with and participate in. However it is done, the capacity to create the space in which ordinary people feel safe enough to pause, become curious, explore and then act is essential.

Posted by **Soapbox Editor** on Nov 16, 2011

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From http://blogs.nature.com/soapbox_science/

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From The Tablet 8th Oct 2011

Virtue out of necessity

Climate change and Christianity

Paul Bodenham - 8 October 2011

Is there any real alternative to the capitalism that has thrust the global economy into turmoil and threatens the very planet that sustains human life? There is, a Cambridge conference heard last week, but it depends on an urgent renewal of a humble humanity

Two years ago public concern about climate change reached a high tide. Fifty thousand people marched on Parliament in December 2009 to demand a "fair, ambitious and binding" global deal at the Copenhagen summit. It was a spectacle not only of hope but of faith, with placards from Christian agencies waving as far as the eye could see.

The summit delivered only a voluntary accord to limit climate change, which many campaigners judged a failure on all counts. But now the highest profile victim of that failure seems to be the green movement itself. Much of it is now wracked by self-doubt and self-criticism.

There are pockets of self-assurance still, not least the National Trust's current protest against a radical shake-up of the planning system in England. If the new National Planning Policy Framework goes through, councillors will be expected to apply a new "presumption in favour of sustainable development". It sounds worthwhile but many fear this is a wolf in sheep's clothing, tipping the balance in the developers' favour.

It's that word "sustainable" that is the cause of angst. Deep down, everyone knows it has become a virtually worthless currency. Even the Coalition Government acknowledges that the United Kingdom's carbon footprint is at least five times what the climate can tolerate. Until that's sorted out one so-called "sustainable" supermarket hooked up to our largely fossil-fuelled electricity supply, even one more affordable starter home, only adds to the burden.

So a conference entitled "Sustainability in Crisis", held last week at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge, met the mood of the moment head-on. The event was organised by the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion and the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics.

There have been serious attempts to show that we do not need to keep labouring at the treadmill of endless economic expansion in order to flourish as a society. For example, the Sustainable Development Commission, shortly before its immolation in the "bonfire of the quangos" last year, published *Prosperity without Growth: economics for a finite planet* by Professor Tim Jackson. He set out an almost Franciscan vision of an alternative economic system that would respect ecological limits, halt consumerism and roll back

inequality.

But on current rhetoric the chances of any government ushering in a zero-growth economy are non-existent, not least because of the difficulty of imposing the necessary social upheaval in a democracy. "I wouldn't put tuppence on zero-growth being feasible," Paul Ekins, a professor in energy policy from University College London told the conference.

His recipe was more pragmatic, but it still might not be economic growth as we know it. "Can the amount of money continue growing without an increasing impact in terms of matter and energy? In theory, yes." He argued for a strenuous programme of green investment through "environmental tax reform" – taxation that would discourage damaging activity, particularly energy consumption, and stimulate the transition to low-impact technology.

Like many speakers at the conference, Paul Ekins was a man in a race against time. "The problem is we haven't tried. And the longer we fail to act, the harder it will be," he said. The International Energy Agency already fears that global warming could breach the United Nations' crucial safety threshold of 2 degrees centigrade during this century. Either his trust in decoupling economic growth from material consumption will be vindicated, or a system still wedded to natural resources will hit the buffers, and with it countless human livelihoods.

Tax reform might lack the spiritual romance of "zero-growth", but his closing challenge – for a radical switch from consumption to investment – was an implicitly theological one. The Victorians invested 40 per cent of their gross domestic product, and we could do the same. But for that we will need the cardinal virtues of temperance and prudence by the spadeful.

Evangelical writer Ruth Valerio also appealed to virtue – in her case humility, frugality, justice and love. She drew attention to the hundreds of "Transition Towns" throughout the UK and worldwide, part of a movement that encourages groups to meet to try to build lives based on mutual self-reliance. Dr Paul Chambers, a civil servant in the Department for Energy and Climate Change, likewise urged churches to "create and communicate visions of sustainable civilisations with attractive lifestyles".

Dr Tom Crompton had found in his research for the international wildlife charity, WWF-UK, that people with strong "intrinsic values", which emphasise community, affiliation and self-development, were more likely to care for the environment than those with socially competitive "extrinsic values". "Values are like a muscle," he told delegates. "The more you use them the stronger they get", and he encouraged faiths to act as brokers for a coalition, not just on the environment but across civil society, to help society limber up with intrinsic values.

Questioning economic growth is not new; the Club of Rome's report "The Limits to Growth" did it in 1972. But the conference took another angle that

has not featured high on the green agenda – the Western economy’s unregulated and unsustainable debt. Several speakers argued that, by lending money “from nothing”, banks have not only fuelled a financial crisis, but triggered an environmental one, as consumption overreaches material reality. The current rash of bank bailouts is only making things worse.

Ann Pettifor, who has previously led the Jubilee 2000 and Operation Noah campaigns, did not pull her punches: “We are living in the most usurious age ever, and the Churches’ silence has been complicit in that ... The Church has failed to condemn the despotic power of interest”, despite the Bible’s denunciation of usury.

The presence of the three Muslim speakers in the programme only added to the reproach. Dr Fazlun Khalid, director of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, recalled the Qur’an’s teaching that “those who practise usury will not rise from the grave except as someone driven mad by Satan’s touch”. All three shared remarkably cohesive ecological insights from a tradition that still eschews lending at interest.

Professor Bill McKibben, founder of the worldwide climate-change campaign 350.org, showed just how hard it is for traditional moral codes to foster sustainable virtue. The problem is one of degree. For modern consumers the moral calculations we have to make are not “yes or no, but how far do you go?” We have developed economic systems (he singled out American agribusiness) that are not just too big to fail, but ultimately too big to succeed – as we shall find to our cost.

Soul-searching on the scale of contemporary debt, both social and environmental, is likely to be the conference’s greatest legacy. But already it was clear that, whatever financial and technological fixes are introduced, success requires a renaissance of virtue. And that takes us out of the realms of technology and policy, and even of ethics, and into the realm of the Gospel.

The Church has a rare opportunity next year to take on this challenge. At the Synod on the “new evangelisation” in Rome, bishops will meet to listen for the good news, not just for our time but for rising generations. The planet needs more than meat-free Fridays and government-sponsored “sustainability”. As this conference made clear, it needs a humbled, renewed humanity, and above all a sense of urgency.

CAMBRIDGE CONFERENCE CONSIDERS SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Faith focuses on planet care

HOW faith communities can influence attitudes and provoke action towards sustainability to tackle climate change was the subject of a conference in Cambridge last week. Speakers at the Sustainability in Crisis conference considered sustainable growth, consumption and production.

In his speech, Paul Ekins, Professor of Energy and Environmental Policy at University College London, outlined the economic considerations of sustainability.

'The key question is whether economic growth can continue without having an impact on the environment. Theoretically, it is possible through decoupling, whereby as an economy grows, so the environmental impact and resource use in that economy decline.'

The resistance comes, the professor acknowledged, when trying to put necessary lifestyle changes into practice.

'To attain a reasonably low-carbon economy we will need to invest £200 billion between now and 2020. There is no evidence to suggest that strong action to mitigate climate change will cost more than 2 per cent of GDP. At present, Britain is a consumer economy. We need to be an investor economy.'

Ann Pettifor, who was cofounder of the Third World debt cancellation campaign Jubilee 2000, questioned the morality of usury.

'The whole credit system is out of control,' she said. 'Necessary regulation of



Debt campaigner Ann Pettifor

credit is not enough. It must be underpinned by moral values. This is where the Church can help.'

American environmentalist Bill McKibben argued for a shift in consumption patterns.

'Consumption in the West has become counterproductive, doing us more harm than good,' he said. 'Institutions – banks, food production and energy provision – have become too big to succeed. The one thing driving economic problems is the global trading of the limited pool of fossil fuel energy, on

which everyone relies.

'The price of carbon – as well as regulation in the financial sector – needs to be regulated if sustainability is to be achieved.'

Addressing the morality of consumerism, he said: 'A consumer society professes to make each of us the centre of the world – we want, we get. This being elevated to deity is ethically and spiritually problematic, and people of faith want to challenge it.'

Public willingness to change is key to the acceptance of renewable energy, according to Juliet Davenport, founder of Good Energy.

'The UK already has the natural wind, wave, tidal, solar and geothermal resources that would enable all our energy to come from renewable

sources by 2050,' she said. 'Scepticism is holding us back. Until the public tell the politicians this is what they want, there will be no change and the UK will continue to have no control over the price and supply of energy.'

Organiser Professor Bob White spoke to *The War Cry* about his hopes for the conference.

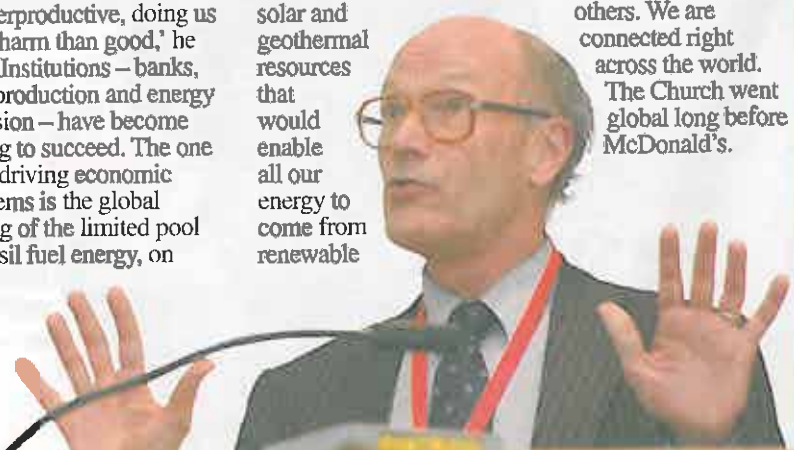
'For Christians, Jesus' injunction to love your neighbour includes people on the other side of the world whose homes will be destroyed when sea levels rise as a result of fossil fuel burning. People of faith have more reason to do something about climate change than others. We are connected right across the world.'

The Church went global long before McDonald's.

'Christians – perhaps biggest special-interest group in the UK – have enormous political clout we chose to use it. If we Christians said that Britain has to take action in response to climate change then politicians would have to take notice if they want to get elected.'

The conference was organised by the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion and the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics.

● For more information faraday-institute.org.uk



Policy analyst Professor Paul Ekins

YOUR prayers are requested for John and Cath, having to adapt to a difficult separation because of care needs.

The War Cry invites readers to send in requests for prayer including the names of

individuals and details of the circumstances. Send your requests to **PRAYERLINK** The War Cry, 101 Newington Causeway, London SE1 6BN. Mark your envelope 'Confidential'

PRAYERLINK

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Changing climate

REMEMBER Swampy? In the 1990s Swampy (otherwise known as Daniel Hooper) found fame as an eco-warrior protesting at road-building sites. Today, the climate has changed.

Melting polar ice-caps and alpine glaciers, greenhouse gases, recycling and renewables, carbon credits and footprints are no longer the concern only of 'tree-hugging' environmental activists. Society is involved.

Scientists generally agree that climate change is a reality and that its rate of acceleration is caused, at least in part, by the use of fossil fuels. The scientific search for practical, affordable, alternative energy sources is on.

Politicians generally agree with the scientific analysis. By last month, 191 nations had signed and ratified the Kyoto Protocol, undertaking to reduce greenhouse gases. In the UK, local councils have targets to reduce landfill. Householders fill recycling bins, deposit their cast-offs at clothes banks, shop at farmers' markets, buy Fairtrade products and read newsprint sourced from sustainable forests.

Planet Earth is the responsibility of all its inhabitants. It is not a private hobby. Sustainability is not an enthusiast's hobby horse. Goodwill will achieve only so much. Humankind is naturally selfish. There are two mechanisms that can deliver sustainability – political will and spiritual motivation.

Politicians and their voters have to care enough about the overuse of the world's finite resources to introduce – to enshrine in law – radical lifestyle changes, such as dependence on renewable energy.

For many people, the motivation to live simply so people can simply live comes from their Christian faith. Christianity affirms God as Creator and humankind as stewards of God-given resources. Jesus' injunction to 'love your neighbour' includes a cost to such caring.

The world has moved on since the days of Swampy. But unless consumers in the rich West are prepared to pay, then some of the world's poorest, least carbon-consuming people will find rising sea levels swamping them.