

Columban Connections

The Columban Centre for Peace Ecology & Justice



The Centre responds from a Gospel perspective to the regional and global challenges associated with peace, ecology and justice.

SEPTEMBER 2005

COORDINATOR'S COMMENTS

That Debt cancellation is essential for the alleviation of extreme poverty in the world was admitted at the recent G8 Summit. It is achievable. This issue of Connections looks at how debt impacts on peace, the environment and the lives of people. We present some views from poor countries critiquing the agenda of the rich nations, and some stories about Columbans working at the "coalface".

Key events are coming up. September 9th - Make Poverty History White Band Day; 14th-16th – the UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals; 26th-27th the World Bank and IMF spring meetings in Washington DC. We urge all readers to support the Jubilee Australia debt campaign www.jubileeaustralia.org and the Make Poverty History Campaign <http://www.acfid.asn.au/> at two levels – 1) activate community interest and action within your sphere of influence 2) inform and lobby your local MP.

While Australia has cancelled some debt its policy is to follow the IMF and World Bank line which really is to "free up trade" and "improve governance". The underlying principle is "blame the victim" and take no responsibility for the mess. We invite you to educate our leaders about the debt issue and let them know that thousands of their constituents want them to keep the promises Australia made when it signed the Millennium Development Goals www.unmillenniumproject.org The Columban Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice co-ordinates the Jubilee Australia Sydney Working Group and is part of the Jubilee Australia National Working Group.

As individuals we can, at times, feel that such issues and problems are just too overwhelming to be dealt with in any way effectively. But there are two things to keep in mind in the work for peace and justice. First, if we really desire peace each of us must set ourselves an agenda that goes beyond dismantling unjust structures and changing attitudes that, on the surface, appear to be just and right. We must face the far more difficult task of 'dismantling' our minds and hearts. The Gospels call it 'metanoia' – a change of mind and heart. Second, one of the reasons for this newsletter is to let people know that they are not alone in their struggle and to put such people in touch with others who themselves have gone through such a metanoia. They are many and together much can be achieved.

In the Catholic Church we do have a solid basis for such action. This year is the fortieth anniversary of the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (Gaudium et Spes – Joy and Hope, 1965). It is worth considering what the Church teaches about peace. One of its great contributions was

its insistence on the interdependence – economic, political, cultural and moral – aspects of society. These principles remain valid. They should wake us up to the growing call for peacemakers and the call for new ways to settle disputes which are closer to the Gospel. Peace is about protesting against violence, terrorism and war. It is about working for a more just world where cancellation of debts is one part, along with the calls for more aid, just distribution and fair trade rules.

Rather than engaging in the current campaign of fear and distrust being waged under the banner of "terrorism", we continue to "grow peace". In late June, we conducted a public forum, "Christians and Muslims Growing Peace in Hornsby". We are preparing for our first rural Christian Muslim Peace Forum in the city of Griffith on September 9th. We congratulate the Local Councils which participate in this initiative to bring people together to hear Christians and Muslims speak about active nonviolence from the perspective of each faith tradition.

The move to Strathfield has opened up new opportunities for us to cooperate with ACU and other groups in the area. We continue to work with schools and groups doing workshops, providing resources and support. We continue to cooperate with other PEJ groups across interfaith, ecumenical and secular "divides". In this way we build solidarity and strength in our mission for the reign of God.

Issue 9 of Gospel of Life, Reign of God is just out. Issue 10, Mission will be out in November. That will complete the series. Some back copies may still be available.



Aboriginal elder, Max Eulo doing the Smoking Ceremony prior to the official opening of ACU.

The G8 Summit and the terrorist bombings in the UK bring home the connection between debt and peace, between the economic and the military. Where debt repayments are a higher priority than services basic to a decent life, peace is difficult to attain. People are put under great stress. A nation's strategic geopolitical and military position influences lending decisions and debt management by International Financial Institutions. In many countries military expenditure comes before basic services and has incurred much of the debt. The military option, instead of "peacemaking", creates conditions for increased violence.

In Iraq, overseas companies are benefitting economically by servicing the occupation and rebuilding what a decade of sanctions and the military invasion has destroyed. The people of Iraq are now poorer than they were prior to 1991. http://www.independentmedia.tv/gtheme.cfm?ftheme_id=35

Jubilee Iraq estimates that Iraq's total debt incurred during the Saddam regime is about \$95-153bn. Odious debts, the "personal" debts of a particular regime are contracted without the consent of the people and are not spent in their interests. Most of Saddam's debts are odious since under his rule the Iraqi people were decimated and impoverished while huge sums were pilfered by the Ba'ath leadership and spent on the military and state oppression. **All the creditors were well aware of what was happening with loans they were providing.**

Iraq is the world's most heavily indebted country. Although loan debt is not yet being serviced, ongoing reparation payments are diverting critical funds from humanitarian relief. On 8 April, the day that Kofi Annan received a mandate to use the Oil for Food fund to meet emergency needs, and as the UN launched a flash appeal to fund relief, \$870m was paid from Oil for Food to Kuwait, Britain and others. More recently, on 23 June, the UN called for \$259m to meet a shortfall in humanitarian relief, while the UN Compensation Commission simultaneously announced that it expected to take a further \$600m from Iraq this year. The contradiction in these announcements is very clear; giving with one hand and taking with the other.

(<http://www.jubileeiraq.org/background.htm>)

Australia is owed about \$600 million dollars in export credit loans from when the Australian Wheat Board traded with Saddam. The Australian Government has agreed to forgive about 85% of the total Iraqi debt but about \$100 million will still have to be repaid by the Australian taxpayer, the wheat growers and the people of Iraq. (see Australian Debt Inquiry Ends Feb 24, 2005 www.jubileeiraq.org) Australia, the US and others have agreed to forgive Iraq's debt, based

on the recognition that it has no chance of repaying the total debt. The Iraqi Finance Minister said in July 2004, "Our debt write-off would help in moderating the crude oil prices in the long term as we would be able to exploit our oil resources efficiently ...forgiving our debt is critical to the economy which has been affected by external and internal wars for many years.." (see www.jubileeiraq July 7, 2004)

Columbians work in Pakistan. Its public debt is 60% of GDP and the poverty gap is widening. see www.worldbank.org.pk The support of its President for the US war on terrorism after September 11 was rewarded with a US \$1 billion debt write-off (*IOU The Debt Threat and Why We Must Diffuse It*, Hertz, p 38) The question is "Who really pays the debt?"

The cost of the military option is enormous. In 2004, world military expenditure was US \$1.03 trillion (Weapons: A Trillion Dollar Trade – www.zenit.org 27th Aug 2005) Australia has spent more than \$1.25 b since 2003 on the invasion and occupation of Iraq. In the words of six Iraqi labor leaders: "The occupation has been a catastrophe for both our peoples. In Iraq, it has destroyed homes and industry, national institutions and infrastructure - water, sanitation, electric power and health services. It has killed many thousands, and left millions homeless and unemployed. It has poisoned the people, their land and water with the toxic residue of the war.

In the United States, more than 1700 working families have suffered loss of loved ones and thousands more have been wounded, disabled or psychologically scarred in a war that serves no legitimate purpose. The cost of the war has led to slashing of social programs and public services. It has militarized our economy, undermined our own liberties and eroded our democratic rights. Working Class Solidarity against US occupation of Iraq

As **Christians** we are called to learn to live nonviolently and to act in solidarity with the innocent victims. It can be clearly shown that where there is the will, debt cancellation occurs. Instead of waging militarism against "terrorism", 100% cancellation of the unpayable debts of poor countries would give peace a greater chance. Let's continue to work for this to happen!

The Debt of the Dictators – This DVD tells the facts and the legacy of the odious debts from the apartheid era in South Africa, the military regime in Argentina and the Marcos period in the Philippines. It is available from Fredrik Glad-Gjernes, Norwegian Church Aid email ncaoslo@nca.no

“God created the universe in such a manner that all in common might derive their food from it, and that the earth should also be a property common to all.It is not from your own goods that you give to the beggar; it is a portion of his own that you are restoring to him. The earth belongs to all. So you are paying back a debt and think that you are making a gift to which you are not bound.” St Ambrose AD 340 – 397

The debt of poor countries is linked to colonization and exploitation. Environmental damage has been caused by the lending practices of creditors or the economic restructuring conditions imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. Indebted countries in turn are forced to further exploit their natural resources to pay off debt. They do not have the money to spend on ecological rehabilitation.

Ecological Debt is the idea that “the North” has built up a debt to “the South” through our history of exploiting their environments for our benefit. It turns the notion of “third world debt” on its head by showing that far from being owed a debt by the world’s poorest countries, industrialized countries have an obligation and responsibility towards poorer countries because of our over consumption of the world’s natural resources.’.... (see “From Environmental Justice to Ecological Debt”, Tara O’Leary, Chain Reaction, Summer 2004 <http://www.foe.org.au/mainfiles/cr.htm>)

Australia is ringed to the north and east by ecologically rich neighbours with abundant tropical bio-diversity – Indonesia, West Papua, PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji. The logging companies of Malaysia, China, South Korea and Japan entice poor villagers and bribe greedy middlemen to log rainforests in an unsustainable way. We buy products from these companies. When the logs are gone there is soil erosion, polluted reefs, lost species habitat, patrimony spent. The people living on the Fly River of PNG which was heavily polluted by tailings from the OkTedi copper mine run by BHP still cannot wash in the river. Yet BHP Billiton recently made Australia’s largest ever company profit.

A global tribunal on Ecological Debt and Human Rights is planned for Brussels late in 2006

Export Credit Agencies (ECAs) are government backed corporations that assist domestic companies operating overseas by providing loans, credit insurance and political risk insurance. Worldwide, export credit-generated debt

now accounts for 56% of the debts owed by the South to official creditors (Official debt is between public institutions/governments). This means that more money is owed to ECAs than to the World Bank and IMF combined.

ECAs are now the largest public financiers of environmentally and socially destructive projects in the developing world, dwarfing the World Bank. The Three Gorges Dam project in China has received US\$1.5 b in loans guarantees from European ECAs. It will force the relocation of 1.3 m people and drown 13 cities. (*IOU*, Hertz p 55). Unlike the World Bank, most ECA’s have no environmental standards or long term monitoring of projects. They can give money to whomever they like. It is also nearly impossible to investigate who they are lending to and what projects they are backing due to commercial in confidence legislation.

ECAs promote climate change. It is estimated that the thermal power, oil and gas projects in developing countries that OPIC and EX-Im (the US ECAs) supported between 1992 and 1998 equalled the global CO2 emissions for the entire year of 1996.

The Australian ECA, Export Finance Insurance Corporation historically has been a massive supporter of coal exports, coal fired power plants, infrastructure and gas pipelines. After sustained community pressure, EFIC introduced minimal environmental guidelines. There is no reference to climate impacts of projects. Over the past 3 years EFIC has maintained support for a variety of fossil fuel projects. Aidwatch is currently coordinating civil society groups in a review of these environmental guidelines. (Janneke Bruil, Friends of the Earth, www.foei.org/ifi and Kate Walsh, Aidwatch www.aidwatch.org.au)

Some Waste Tips

Recycle aerosol spray cans! They are valuable and safe to recycle. They no longer contain CFCs so they don’t damage the ozone layer. Before recycling, make sure they are empty, not pierced or crushed and have the plastic lids removed. Remember that recycling comes third after reducing and reusing!

Save mobile phones from ending up in landfill! An estimated 12.4 million unused phone handsets are lying around in home cupboards in Australia and an estimated 40% are not working. Australians are buying nearly 4 million new mobile phones per year. 1.5% of those being recycled are sent overseas for resale.

Clean Up Australia receives \$3 for every phone donated 9552 6177 www.cleanup.com.au

The Last Look - the human face of debt.

It happened when I went to preside at the funeral of a one week old baby girl. ...As is the custom, the face of the child was uncovered to allow the grieving family and friends one last look. I was standing on the edge of the grave looking down on the body of the child lying on the earth. There before my eyes was the most beautiful smile I have ever seen on the face of any human being. How can this be? Such beauty on the face of a dead child?

If the mother had proper pre-natal care, the child might not have died. If the government didn't spend 70% of its budget on defence and paying off the foreign debt and only 3% on health and education, the child may still be alive. If there was no corruption, there may have been enough facilities at the local hospital and the child might not have died. There are many reasons why this child shouldn't have died. In her brief life the child was victim of many injustices that are at work in this world of ours. It certainly wasn't the will of God that she died. Despite everything she smiled through it all. She revealed beauty. Where did the smile come from? The only answer I can give is that she has seen something you and I still have not seen. She has broken through the pain, brokenness and injustice of this world and encountered the Fullness of the Mystery. She has seen the face of God and lived.

About half the funerals I have presided over in my time in Matli, Sindh, in Pakistan have been of children. To visit the graveyard and to see the small mounds of clay makes a painful and poignant scene. Every November 2, All Soul's Day the Eucharist is celebrated in the graveyard in the evening. I always find it a moving liturgy, finishing as the sun sets. After the Mass people go to their loved one's graves, light candles and incense sticks and place them on the graves along with rose petals. Then they pray in silence. It is a powerful spiritual experience in the midst of so much pain and brokenness.

Tomas King is an Irish Columban who works in Sind, Pakistan where the tribal people, the Parkari Kholi, are.

We must rock the world to make poverty history

I have something in common with the world's best known Irish rock stars, Bono and Bob Geldof, organisers of the world-wide Live 8 music concerts that rocked the world to "Make Poverty

History". Bono lives up the road from my home in Ireland. Bob is a town mate from Dun Laoghaire. We were all members of teenage rock bands in our youth. Bob and Bono went on to try and save Africa and I came to the Philippines as a Columban missionary 36 years ago.

We are driven by the idealism to end world poverty and economic injustice. We believe too in the power of theatre and music to increase public awareness about the suffering of the poor just like Jesus used parables. During the "Make Poverty History" campaign, the Preda-Akbay theatre group was doing its little bit performing in Ireland as part of a European tour. This powerful emotionally charged musical drama by talented Filipino teenagers brings across how irresponsible mining causes environmental destruction that leads to poverty and the trafficking of youth into the sex industry. **Their performance won long-standing ovations wherever they performed. The performance of the G8 leaders of the rich nations at Gleneagles in Edinburgh could have been better...** It (Live 8) was a soft non-confrontational approach pitched to the leaders as a one-time historical chance to change Africa. It placed the responsibility for world hunger at their feet. The single message to the world was "These men must be held accountable". Powerful stuff indeed but did it really move the hardened hearts of the world leaders? Bob Geldof declared it a great success. Others are more sceptical and doubt if hearts so hardened by corporate interests and greed could be changed by singing and dancing pop stars.

True it is that many leaders and officials of the impoverished nations are corrupt and are at the root of poverty and its attendant evils. But who lures them into dependency by pushing on them unsustainable loans? Who manipulates, controls and uses them to exploit their own people and their nations natural resources if not the multinationals of the rich nations. Who excludes the poor from the world markets? The very same ones, some say, that finance the election of the G8 leaders and in return get protection for their immoral exploitation of the poor nations...For all that the campaign and concerts are a big step forward in building public awareness and challenging the rich to give back what they have stolen from the poor. Perhaps I should have been a rock star too.

Shay Cullen is a Columban who runs the Preda Foundation in the Philippines www.preda.org

The following are some articles written in response to the G8 Summit debt announcement and recent global appointments. They present alternative views and critiques of the international financial system from the perspective of the South.

Justice Demands Unconditional and Total Debt Cancellation For All South Countries!

<http://www.jubileesouth.org/news/EEEFuVVVuzazQTNXT.shtml>

African Debt, War and Imperialism are Linked by Virginia Rodino

<http://www.counterpunch.org/rodino08012005.html>

Governments Trying to Unstitch G8 Deal www.eurodad.org/articles

Columban Mission Institute

C/- Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 2002, Strathfield, NSW, 2135
Phone 02 9352 8000 Fax 02 9746 8033
Email pej.cmi@columban.org.au

Columban Mission

PO Box 752, Niddrie, VIC 3042
Phone 03 9375 9475 Fax 03 9379 6040
Email kboyle55@hotmail.com



COLUMBAN MISSION

www.columban.org.au/cmi/cmi_pej.htm

Coming Events

September

- 9th **Nominations close** for the United Nations Association of Australia National Media Peace Awards 2005. www.unaavictoria.com.au (03) 9482 3655 e-mail: unaa.vic@bigpond.com
- 10th & 11th **The Heart and Soul of Non-violence: People seeking Peace Forum** – contact **Brendan McKeague**, Ph 9244-8090/Email: mckeague@iprimus.com.au
- 14th National Launch **Social Justice Sunday** Statement, North Sydney 9956-5811 fax 9954-0056.
- 15th-16th Millennium Summit+5, New York www.un.org.
- 15th-16th NCC **The great Greenhouse Gamble Conference on Climate Change**, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Fax 9279 2499 Ph 9279 2466.
- 15th **Public Forum: “Another Tourism is Possible.”** National Council of Churches Gender Commission, NSW Parliament House Theatre. Ph: 02.9299.1255 or dporter@ncca.org.au

Australian Mission Network Conference: Witness to the Gospel in Australia, Celebrating 30 Years of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

Registration: Catholic Mission 1800 257 296, Fax 02 9411 4622.

18th – Bulleen Vic/ Sept 22nd / Perth WA Sept 25th/ Adelaide, / SA Sept 30th – Brisbane, / Oct 1st – Sydney

- 21st International Day of Peace. www.un.org/peace
- 21st **Frank Brennan** public lecture “Mixing Law, Religion and Politics” – Sydney. Ph 03 9953-3856.
- 25th **Social Justice Sunday** – Theme: Living the Gospel in Today’s Society.
- 25th Diving into the Deep, Engaging with Justice Today – Mary MacKillop Place North Sydney, ph 02 8741 2326 marion.gambin@sosj.org.au
- 30th – Oct 1st **Imagining our Sacred Future** – Seminar with David Tacey – Effective Living Centre www.effectiveliving.org/sacred.htm

October

Indian Federation of UNAs to host a Model UN for the Asia/Pacific region. Info: www.wfuna.org

8th & 9th ARC Conference *Imagining Church in Australia*, Chatswood, Sydney. RSVP Chris 02 9747 1787; chris.crothers@bigpond.com.au

1st Monday in October World Habitat Day www.unchs.org

16th World Food Day www.fao.org & www.wfp.org

17th-22nd Anti-Poverty Week. Info: Olivia Appleby: coordinator@antipovertyweek.org.au or ph 03 9534 8250.

17th International Day for the Eradication of Poverty www.un.org/esa/socdev/poverty.htm

23rd – 29th **Refugee Week** - Info: Refugee Council of Australia, Annette McKail ph: 03 9416 0044 e-mail: rcoa.vic@bsl.org.au website: www.refugeecouncil.org.au

24th **United Nations Day** www.un.org

24th - 30th Disarmament Week. www.un.org/Depts/dda

November

9th City of Sydney Peace Prize Lecture by UN children’s rights worker **Olara Otunnu** Seymour Centre, Sydney. Info: **Andrew Potter**, 02 9351 4514.

17th & 18th National Conference *One in Christ Jesus*, Randwick, NSW. ACBC Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office.

18th– 20th National Climate Change Conference “Our Responsibility to Sustain God’s Earth”, Canberra, opened by **Wangari Maathai**, email: conference@catholicearthcareoz.net ph 02 4655 4855.

Victor Couch Lecture by Columban **Sean McDonagh**, ACU Campus, North Sydney. For further information contact **Anne Lanyon** Columban Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice: 02 9352 8021

25th International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women. www.un.org/womenwatch

27th - Dec 2nd *PACE E BENE GATHERING 2005*, ‘Engaging Nonviolence – Deep Listening to the Spirit’, Pallotti College, Millgrove, Vic. 3799. Tel: (07) 3851-1325.

December

1st World Aids Day www.unaids.org

2nd International Day for the Abolition of Slavery www.ohchr.org

9th, 10th “**Safe Food- Your Human Right**”, International Conference, Manila, Philippines email fatherbriangore@hotmail.com

10th Human Rights Day www.ohchr.org

January

11th –15th, ’06 Ballarat, Victoria National Justice Festival: *WHAT IF?- JUSTICE IS POSSIBLE* Visit www.myam.org.au/njf for more information.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal One Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day

Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Goal Two Achieve universal primary education

Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Goal Three Promote gender equality and empower women

Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015

Goal Four Reduce child mortality

Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate

Goal Five Improve maternal health

Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

Goal Six Combat HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases

Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Goal Seven Ensure environmental responsibility

Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and program and reverse the loss of environmental resources

Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without access to adequate sanitation

Have achieved, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

Goal Eight Develop a global partnership for development

Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system

Address the Least Developed Countries' special needs

Address the special needs of landlocked and small island developing states

Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt

In cooperation with the developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youth

Provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries

Make available the benefits of new technologies – especially information and communication technologies

To see the latest on the progress of the MDGs http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_goals.asp

*Ideal for Parish, School group focus on MDGs - an **interactive MDG Prayer Walk** click onto http://www.tear.org.au/advocacy/mc.mph/takeaction_mdg_prayerwalk.php*

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FAITH ECOLOGY NETWORK- PEACE FROM THE GROUND UP

Two years ago, the Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice, through the work of Charles Rue, brought together representatives of various faith traditions in Sydney to form the **Faith Ecology Network (FEN)**. Through FEN, believers can share faith perspectives on ecology and encourage greater involvement in environmental action. The faiths so far actively represented include Catholics, Uniting Church, Anglicans, Muslims, Hindu, Bahai, and Buddhists as well as the Aboriginal tradition.

The network mainly operates by email, but every so often, an event brings people together to talk, listen and learn from each other. The initial gathering in 2003 on the theme of “**Wonder and the Will to Care**” introduced members to each faith’s general view of the natural world. At the next event, “**Water of Life**”, the importance of water in each tradition was explored through music, ritual and prayer as well as discussion. From that an **Interfaith Statement on Water** was produced www.columban.org.au/cmi/pej (currently under reconstruction). Another gathering provided the opportunity to hear a variety of **Environmental Ethical Frameworks**, including Permaculture www.permaculture.org, the Earth Charter www.earthcharter.org, five environmental principles in Islam, Catholic Environmental Teaching, Earth Bible principles, and the Bahai submission on the Earth Charter and Sustainable Development <http://bic-un.bahai.org/91-0405.htm> Aboriginal members have contributed with their wisdom and knowledge of our ancient land.

This year, two young members from the Hindu and Buddhist faiths, Mahesh Radhakrishnan and Nilushi Disanayake took on the role of organizing a joint forum on environmental and spiritual issues with another interfaith group called “**Pathways to Peace**”. With the quirky title of “**Pathways to Peas – Peace from the Ground Up,**” it began with a traditional acknowledgement of country by Frances Bodkin and a visit to the Auburn Gallipoli mosque hosted by the Affinity Intercultural Foundation www.affinity.org . The group then walked to the nearby Auburn Community Peace Garden for lunch, talks, prayer and seed-planting. Nilushi responded to the very interesting day with a creative reflection on “A Gift of Light” (see over page).

Respect for the integrity of God’s creation is foundational in all faiths. The urgency of dealing with the damaging effects of human behaviour on the environment is the responsibility of all people. Dialogue between faiths as well as with the environmental movement is important in order to be more effective in action. This dialogue is growing and developing: FEN has been joined by another Faith Ecology Network based in Canberra http://au.groups.yahoo.com/group/spirituality_environment/ The latest edition of **Chain Reaction**, the magazine of Friends of the Earth Australia, wholly features Faith and Ecology www.foe.org.au **The Catholic Earthcare** National Climate Change Conference “Our Responsibility to Sustain God’s Earth”, to be held in Canberra November 18th – 20th , www.catholicearthcareoz.org will involve the environmental movement.

To join FEN simply email faith_ecology_network-subscribe@yahogroups.com.au

ADVANCE NOTICE

The Victor Couch Lecture will be given by Columban, Sean McDonagh at the MacKillop Campus, Australian Catholic University, North Sydney on Tuesday 22nd November, starting at 6pm. Sean’s most recent books are *Dying for Water* and *Patenting Life? Stop!*

For further information contact the Columban Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice ph 02 9352 8021

A Gift of Light

A circle on the roof of a magnificent structure,
Built to pay homage to the higher...
An ancient language traces the words of a scripture...
Names of prophets line the hall...
A feeling of energy in a place that is holy...
A gift of light to all those there

A friend from Affinity gave us a gift...

Of awareness of the beliefs, he holds so dear...
Of how he prays and what it means...
A gift of light to all those there

Then to the place where the Hindu youth group...
Cooked for all at the event
An Inspiration
Busy serving food and washing dishes,
They gave us a gift
A gift of light to all those there

And then they came...
Many faces and cultures and faiths...
Peace pilgrims walked from the Mosque to the garden
Under the shade of the harmony tree
Among the plots of herbs and vegies
Planted by hard work and the Auburn community
A gift of place by our host and MC

There were babies and old ladies
Wide brim hats and shawls
Sat on chairs rushed in at last minute
Ate with old friends and new ones
Under harmony tree...
That gave us a gift...
Of light to all those there

Sun shining. Son shining.
Michael spoke of the Holy Ghost
That pervades nature, creation
The Trinity
With cautious humility...
and enthusiasm

So we learnt of Christian thoughts
Truly from his heart, he gave us a gift
A gift of light to all those there

So we learnt from the Buddhist and the Baha'i...
With the older language of this land...
Gav and Fran,
Told us to tread well
and the Hindu choir sang...
Lett...uce sow peas. Lettuce!
They gave us a gift of light

In circles we talked and shared
Learned of this view and that
From this person and that,
We reflected critically on our own faiths
Pondered on what it teaches
Hearing the reflections of others
We gave each other a gift...
of light.

A gift of something not easily seen...
Of substance not image
Of open hearts not closed
Of helping hands and respect not blind suspicion
Of what we cared for most

no tabloid headlines will this gathering make
no grieving families will lie in its wake
no glossy ads to persuade what's fake
An effort...cross the line...
That Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn noted
ran through every human heart,
The potential to BE
noble or not so
or not so sure...
We fought a little bit that day...
against the Ignorance of each other
we had before.

A meeting of kind hearts,
An inspiration to practice...
To lessen my clinging to me and mine,
my wavering on Alex's line,
To see beyond me, to that greater we
And maybe...
Some clarity...
To the just be.

Amongst frantic searches for speakers and seekers...
Dear friends, Blessed be!



This poem, written by Nilushi Disanayake, is her description of the Interfaith gathering called "Pathways to Peas" held at the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque, and the Auburn Community Peace Garden, 31st July 2005.