

**ANIMAL WELFARE SERVICE , LIVERPOOL CATHEDRAL**  
**Saturday 5th October 2002**

**For Delivery**

The words 'Liverpool Poets' conjures up names like Roger McGough, Adrian Henry and even Paul McCartney. I doubt that many would include one of England's greatest poets namely Gerard Manley Hopkins. But as a priest in Everton he was most definitely a Liverpool Poet! In 'God's Grandeur' he celebrates a world "charged with the grandeur of God" and contemplates nature where "the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings". This is a beautiful evocation of the enfolding of earth and heaven.

Travelling further up the North West and to the Lakes you meet William Wordsworth. Although Hopkins was highly critical of his poetry Wordsworth in his own way delighted in creation and observed the balance within nature and the relationship between humanity and the rest of the created order. In his poem 'To a Butterfly' he points up the ambivalence to be found in human attitudes to creation:-

My sister Emmeline and I  
Together chased the butterfly!  
A very hunter did I rush  
Upon the prey: -with leaps and springs  
I followed on from brake to bush;  
But she, God love her, feared to brush  
The dust from off its wings.

One child sees the butterfly as a challenge, an object to hunt and capture, and the other reveres it knowing that even to touch it would be to risk damaging it.

This ambivalence towards the natural world possesses humanity like schizophrenia, on the one hand exploiting the earth for all its worth and on the other gazing in awe at the beauty of its form.

The Earth Summit in Johannesburg for all its controversy and lack of effective conclusions at least raised awareness and exposed the exploitative tendency of the human family. Our persistent plundering and consumption of the earth's parlour is again captured by Hopkins:

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

He adds "the soil is bare now" and then:

"And for all of this, nature is never spent"

Well, one wonders whether he could have written so confidently, so optimistically at the beginning of the 21st Century.

The central issue of sustainability is whether we are about to reach or have already reached the point of no return, when nature is spent up. In the one corner John.

McNeill of 'Something New Under the Sun' argues that we are perilously close; in the other, Lomborg 'The Sceptical Environmentalist' warns against the predictions of doom.

The Christian faith is centred on the one "through whom and for whom all things have come into being". This means that fear of the future is complemented by respect and reverence for everything that belongs to Christ -including the animal kingdom.

Yet when Christians go in search of an environmental ethic we usually bypass the Gospels on our way to the Old Testament, and fail to see just how aware Jesus was of the animal world. In Matthew's Gospel alone on 27 separate occasions he introduces us to:

locusts and birds and dogs and pigs and wolves and sheep and foxes  
and snakes and doves and sparrows and vipers and fish and camels  
and donkeys and colts and hens and chicks and vultures and goats  
and a cock .

In a rhyme worthy of a song from 'Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat' we find Jesus embracing animals in his conversations about the Kingdom of God.

This Jesus was, of course, born in a typical Middle Eastern house. It was perfectly natural for an extended family to share their dwelling with their animals. It was a picture of Eden harmony where before the fatal act of consumption human beings shared the Garden with animals. Like every other ordinary child Jesus lived a life that was connected to the environment,

to the animals, to the earth. That's why his thoughts are shot through with images of the earth and a variety of creatures.

Jesus enlists the animals as fellow evangelists. They tell us of God's providence, God's presence and God's peace.

"Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?"

Matthew 6: 26 -27

The birds of Heaven are the evangelists to the earth who sing the good news of God's providence 'if he feeds us he will feed you.'

Jesus says:

"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."

Matthew 10 28 -29

Again the birds of Heaven are the evangelists announcing to the world that not one of them falls to the earth without the Father. Here is the good news. Not that we shall be free from enemies. Jesus had plenty. But that when we fall to the ground

we are not alone. The good Father is with us. Why? Because the earth is his footstool, his resting place.

It was said of Jesus by Mark

"He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him." Mark 1 : 13

In the wilderness Jesus was simply with the wild animals. The way Mark tells it speaks of 'a sense of close association or friendship' (Richard Baukham 'Jesus and the Animals').

Here is "Jesus enjoying the peaceable harmony with wild animals which had been God's original intention".

Jesus brings Eden into the desert and enlists the wild animals as fellow evangelists of God's Peace heralding the Kingdom that is to come where "the wolf shall live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid"; (Isaiah 11: 6)

As well as being heralds of good news the animals are also enlisted as tellers of bad news. When Peter betrays Jesus hot on the heels of the treason of Judas the cock crows as promised.

It is given to a bird to expose the betrayal that in God's over-ruling leads to the salvation of the whole cosmos. No human being raises any voice to protest on behalf of the Innocent against the betrayal of one of his closest friends. Only a bird

whose echoing crow haunted the soul of Peter lifts up his voice in defiant tones against betrayal.

Some would hold, and I for one, that our treatment of the earth and of many of God's creatures amounts to a betrayal of our God-given task to serve the earth and therefore protect the animal world with whom we share the planet.

Yet where are the voices to speak out against the denial, this betrayal? Only the cock crows. I heard a sound like it the other day when caught behind a lorry of crates. What was in them was moving, just. And a muffled sound from a living creature was drowned by an engine belching fumes of oil.

Only the cock crowed. The image of the cock, free to roam, forage and fill the landscape with its dawn chorus is a far cry from the way in which poultry is treated in Britain today. Here, 95% of all chickens are destined to live only seven weeks of their seven year lifespan. What's more, they live life in conditions conveniently hidden behind closed doors.

Broilers, the chickens we eat, and over which we say Grace at Sunday lunch have been bred to be one of the worlds most rapidly growing creatures.

Reared in batches, of up to fifty thousand birds at a time, they are kept on the concrete floor of a windowless shed. Artificial lighting is carefully controlled to avoid over activity in the birds. Movement is restricted through cramped conditions, with each bird having the equivalent of an A4 sheet of paper within which to live and move and have its being. A carefully controlled diet, supplemented with a cocktail of antibiotics, is designed to maximise the

productivity of each batch of birds. The 'broilers' are then loaded into crates and transported to the slaughter house, leaving empty sheds for the next batch of fluffy yellow chicks as they arrive at the factory to be fattened up for our consumption.

This cruel scenario does not sit comfortably alongside pretensions to be a civilised let alone a Christian society.

It is a very far cry from Wordsworth's Emmeline who for Godly fear and reverence of creation dared not 'brush the dust from off its wings'.

One can only imagine what offence is given to the Holy Spirit who broods over this bent world.

“With warm breast and with ah! bright wings”

The Rt Rev James Jones The Bishop of Liverpool

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