

An Evening of Hope for the Planet

The Redemptorist monastery on rue Wily Georgen was the setting for what beckoned to be an intriguing evening. We found ourselves in the monk's refectory now equipped as a conference centre. There was tea, coffee and delicious cake and not a plastic cup or spoon in sight. It was well attended with representation across the ages right down to two quite young boys for whom the cake was definitely the main attraction.

The evening began with a screening of excerpts from the film *Demain*. This wonderful, uplifting film testifies to all the positive initiatives being taken around the globe in support of environmentally sustainable living; small farms producing the world's food efficiently, local currencies being used in many cities, and Copenhagen being well on the way to relying solely on renewable energy by 2025. If there was any drawback to the evening it was that time did not permit more of this compelling and inspiring film.

Then followed a talk by Stephen McCarthy on *Laudato Si* and Christian Hope. *Laudato Si* is Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment which is said to have had no small influence on the Paris climate change talks of 2015. It was, explained Steve, addressed to 'all people of goodwill' as opposed to Catholics only. Equally unusual for a papal encyclical is that a full two thirds of it can be read as a completely secular document. Pope Francis makes the point that it is impossible to talk about environmental matters without touching on issues of social justice and inequality. But as Pope Francis urges us into action and renewal with the painful changes we will have to make in our lives if we want to save our planet, he exhorts us not to lose sight of the reason for our hope... that God is with us always and unto the very end. This is where Christian Hope comes in, explained Steve and it is not the same as optimism. 'Let us sing as we go' are Pope Francis' final encouraging words to readers of the document. More of Steve's talk can be found [here](#).

David Crowther of *natur&emwelt* was the next speaker. This is a Luxembourgish organisation with a membership of 13000 committed to action and education for the protection of nature and wildlife. The 1950s, said David, heralded in three great developments of the time, the era of nuclear power, plastics, and chemical pesticides. Unfortunately, he said, our children and grandchildren will have to clean up after these environmentally toxic developments. But David reminded us of ways in which we can become involved in hands-on conservation work and this can be as simple as reporting on the birds in your own garden which when reported goes on to the national data base. It also provides useful advice on feeding birds and information on plant and wildlife in Luxembourg. There is even an English-speaking section. See ne.english.section@gmail.com for further information.

Simon Norcross of *Greenpeace* gave a short impromptu talk on Greenpeace activities in Luxembourg. For a little country of 600,000 people it has a disproportionately high membership of 9000 when compared to larger countries. He spoke of Greenpeace action in agitating against nuclear power given Luxembourg's proximity to the French station at Cattenom. But he also mentioned the Greenpeace garden and farm in Luxembourg where all can get involved. A list of useful addresses in Luxembourg for becoming involved in care for the environment was distributed to all and Simon collaborated with the organisers in drawing this up.

There then followed a discussion with some comments on plastics and how to avoid them. Don't be afraid to make your views known to your local supermarket David advised. We do not realise how much our custom is valued and action will result from such complaints. Social justice and how to make a living on small farms given a cheap food policy was touched on. Is a Universal Basic Income

the answer? This was where discussion had to be cut short as we were invited to attend the 19.00 mass. This was advertised as a mass of hope with the singing of *Laudato Si* the canticle of St. Francis.

Indeed, this mass certainly delivered on what it said on the tin! Fr Ed Hone gave a passionate homily on the environment and the hope we can take from the fact that God is with us. He showed the congregation the 'cross of St Francis' a wooden crucifix of unusual shape and invited the congregation to come and touch it if committed to making changes in their lives to protect our planet. An almost full church took to their feet to queue to do just that. St Francis is the patron saint of the Environment and throughout the mass pictures of him and his namesake Pope Francis and the *Laudato Si* document were projected on to a screen by the altar alongside photos of environmental destruction.

Special mention has to be given to Claudia Tabone, the Maltese soprano, who sang during this mass. We were clearly in the presence of a great God-given talent that would not have been out of place in La Scala or the Opera Bastille. Her solo at Holy Communion sung in Italian was also in homage to St Francis and she accompanied the entire congregation to a rousing rendition of *Laudato Si* the canticle of St Francis as the final hymn. Claudia was very ably accompanied by Giusi Mazzella on keyboard. It was a privilege to be in the presence of such talent helping us to 'sing as we go' as exhorted by Pope Francis.

This evening was organised by *Diaconia* the social justice group in collaboration with members of the *Laudato Si* study group, all within the city parish of Notre Dame. *Diaconia* is the Greek for 'caring for each other' I'm reliably told. It was certainly an evening to be remembered.

Marcella McCarthy, April 2019