

## Let Us Pod

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### Concern for the environment with Mary Colwell

#### Mary Colwell

Mary Colwell is a parishioner at Clifton Cathedral and award-winning producer at the BBC Natural History Unit based in Bristol. She is a member of the Theology, Faith and Culture Committee of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Mary presented the ground-breaking interactive event 'The Pope & the Iceberg' in October 2005 at Clifton Cathedral. Since then her tenacity and passion has seen her take her message to many audiences with the 'Sound of Many Waters'.

#### Full text of podcast

The increasing number of reports telling us that the environment at every level is under stress and that everyone will suffer is very worrying. Global warming, pollution on a grand scale, extinction of animals, over-fishing; the list goes on and on. It's hard not to feel guilty, powerless and depressed, especially as the reason for all these things is people - you and me - the way all of us live and use the earth. But I'd like to add another voice to this clamour of doom, a voice of hope, of optimism and a voice that says the future can be good and joyous and holy.

A few years ago I was very concerned about the seeming lack of interest in the Church about what was happening to our world. What I read about in the papers, saw on TV or witnessed with my own eyes seemed so serious, so relevant to the lives of people all over the world and so tragic that I started to ask the Catholic church to do something about it, to speak out for those that have no voice, the creatures and the habitats on earth. And the Church *has* responded. In fact there is profound and wise teaching within the Catholic faith, as there is in many other faiths, and I see a real desire to re-awaken those teachings and to find again that wisdom and put it into action. This is a tremendous step forward, not only for the environment, but for faith itself. Because with compassion and concern for the earth comes a whole array of deeper meanings that permeate through all aspects of our lives. When we care about the natural world we care in a different way about each other too - and for the sanctity of all life.

It seems to me that if we listen in a new way to what the Church has actually been saying for 2000 years the world really will be a better place; maybe not tomorrow, maybe not next year, maybe not even in our lifetime, but we can start the process of change for the better. The Catholic faith has always taught that simple, respectful, responsible living is a holy life. It has always taught that greed and selfishness - the root cause of all the environmental problems on earth - are wrong. We just have to listen with a new heart and think about our own lives in a new way. If we put this teaching into practice many environmental problems will begin to heal and the future could be one I would be very happy for my two young sons to inherit.

In the Book of Isaiah we get a vision of a just future, a vision of a world where people have heard and acted - and the earth becomes a place of abundance and fruitfulness once again. Isaiah uses images from the natural world to show how the earth can recover from wastefulness and greed to become a rich place for all to enjoy.

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like the deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.  
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.

I think it is very important when dealing with environmental problems, which are so long term and overwhelming, to realise that we *can't* change the world overnight, but we *can* sow the seeds of change in the sure knowledge that they will one day bear fruit. I find this reading by the martyred Bishop Oscar Romero very helpful.

This is what we are about.  
We plant seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted,  
Knowing that they hold future promise.  
We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces effects  
Far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything,  
And there is a sense of liberation in realising that.  
This enables us to do something, and do it very well.  
It may be incomplete, a step along the way;  
An opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter  
And do the rest.

We may never see the end results;  
But that is the difference  
between the master builder and the worker.  
We are workers, not master builders;  
Ministers, not Messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own.

Lord let us see through the despair about the environment; let us see this crisis as a moment of grace and not a time of distress. With your help we can re-evaluate what is truly important and together bring about a world that is as glorious as you meant it to be.

### **Useful contacts**

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