

REPORT

**Green European Foundation, with
the support of Green Foundation Ireland
and in partnership with the Irish School
of Ecumenics at Trinity College Dublin,
present a one-day**

CONFERENCE

*"Green Values, Religion and Secularism –
Moving beyond the enlightenment division
between science and religion"*



Venue: Irish School of Ecumenics, TCD, Dublin 2
Saturday 1 July 2017 – 09:30 to 17:00

The Conference opened with a welcome from Andrew Pierce, Head of Discipline at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin, and from Nuala Ahern on behalf of GEF and GFI. There were questions after each presentation and a general discussion with the participants at the end of both morning and afternoon sessions.

The morning session was chaired by Geraldine Smyth, Adjunct Associate Professor at the Irish School of Ecumenics.

Erica Myers spoke of Novalis, the German romantic poet, who was openly criticism of the Enlightenment tendency to turn everything into an object, to use it for one's own profit: nature, history and other people. Novalis foresees that even the most autonomous modern citizens are in danger of becoming the object of rational processes over which they have lost control. His warning to the Enlightenment not to overrate the rational capacities of human beings and detach them from emotional and historical knowledge is still valuable today. If we were to green the Enlightenment what would that mean?

Andreas Weber gave his answer to that question when he spoke about how sentience, experience, subjectivity, corporeal embodiment and agency are, in effect, excluded from the Enlightenment view of the world. This is not a historical matter, but deep structural principles in modern culture that have a powerful effect in ordering how we perceive, think and act. It could be said that rational thinking is an ideology which focuses on dead matter. Its premises have no way of comprehending the reality of lived experience; our civilisation might have forgotten what it means to be alive. This is what we need to change if we are to transform our culture. In fact this is already happening in science, but it is not yet communicated visibly to people.

Cathriona Russell defended the Enlightenment as protective of individual liberty and equality, and suggested that religious and philosophical ideas of the good life and duty to others could form an environmental ethics which put community life at its heart, while integrating the values of equality and human rights.

John Feehan maintained that our beliefs, values and behaviour must be informed by reason, which is guided by the way of understanding that is the hallmark of modern science. However, although that mode of knowing is fundamental, it is insufficiently attentive to the universe of our experience, and a deeper and closer attention is indispensable if we are to articulate a more profound response.

Reason is not compromised by faith: there is indeed reciprocity between reason and faith, but it only comes into focus with a widening of the embrace of rationality on the part of reason. Faith also needs to embrace and fully incorporate the deeper appreciation of the creation and our new understanding of cosmogenesis and evolution.

The afternoon session was chaired by Andrew Pierce, Head of Discipline at the Irish School of Ecumenics.

Mary Condren discussed the fact that sacrifice has been a potent symbolism of nationalism in Ireland in the 20th century, and the death of hunger strikers during the 1980s, including the Westminster MP Bobby Sands, resonated deeply into Irish political life. Self sacrifice is also the prevailing ideology of Jihadism; an ideology of terror and sacrifice which threatens us all in unpredictable ways. It is therefore important to counter this ideology of sacrifice at many levels.

She juxtaposed a theology of sacrifice with that of mercy. While the former is ubiquitous in the monotheisms, a theology of mercy can also be found in them all. For example, the Arabic terms for divine mercy, *ar-Rachim* and *ar-Rachman*, can be traced back to the word for womb. For their part, *ar-Rachim* and *ar-Rachman* are related to the Hebrew root *rhm*, which already designates divine and human mercy at the beginning of the Old Testament in the Bible. In this way, in all monotheistic traditions – perhaps in all religions – alternative doctrines and practices can be found that contradict the hegemonic doctrine of the independent, spiritual masculine. She gave examples from both Jewish-Christian and pre-Christian Irish tradition of symbols of mercy as a counterpoint to sacrifice.

Jacob Erickson began by talking of his upbringing on the American prairie and about how religious imagination wrestles with, grieves, and thinks about resilience, ecojustice, joy, and beauty in the on-going wake of climate change. He spoke of how Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Laudato si'* reflects on anthropogenic/human-caused global warming, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, the dangers of unlimited consumerism, "a misguided anthropocentrism," economic growth.

Jacob said that we hear those litanies of devastation often these days; however there's something in the affective language of this letter that is different. The letter's laments are couched in the language of praise. Francis the pope lures the reader in with the poetry of Francis the saint.

What he is haunted by most in reading this letter is its connecting disparate realms of life; the encyclical's balance of tragedy and human sin alongside love, hopefulness, joy, and possibility. Despite the vast ecological devastations, the letter evokes the beauty of our ecological contexts in its descriptions, and its logic argues that learning to see beauty in the everyday is an intrinsic part of an ecological conversion to the earth, *Laudato si'* refuses to make the choice between human and ecological life a zero-sum game. Pope Francis writes that we must realise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

The Conference concluded with an invitation to the participants and speakers to a reception.