

Parliament of World religions sends climate message

The challenges of climate change and ecological sustainability were among the main issues discussed at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne earlier this month. Around 4,000 people gathered for the event from 3 - 9 December. Delegates included Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and representatives from many other religions.

With world leaders about to gather in Copenhagen to discuss setting emissions targets, many religious leaders at the Parliament were keen to stress the need for cooperation on environmental issues among religions.



Prominent Catholic social campaigner Sr Joan Chittister OSB was a special guest at the Parliament, on route to Copenhagen to add her voice to those calling for greater action in the developed world. Speaking to a crowd of around 800 people on Saturday afternoon, Sr Chittister said her message would be particularly aimed at the delegation from the United States.

'I'm one of those people who really believe that it is imperative that we make considerable and significant changes, that we need to make them immediately, and we need to make them globally', she said.

'I worry a lot about the influence of corporate profits over human profits in this arena. We want them to know we are watching, and we will not stop watching, and we will not stop calling America to a higher degree of morality than we have seen in this last 20 years.'

Parliament delegates wrote messages a 60-metre long scroll that will be taken to Copenhagen. There were sessions on religion and ecology, and a series titled 'Connection to Copenhagen' providing analysis of the ecological ramifications of climate change and models seeking to address it. South African Anglican Bishop Geoff Davies organised a statement calling on rich countries to foot the bill for developing countries seeking to utilise green power, while cutting their own emissions. While the Parliament was not about passing formal resolutions, Bishop Davies told *The Age* that a large number of delegates would sign the statement.

'We're calling for the rich to pay for clean energy in developing countries because the rich - Europe, America, Australia and Russia - have an ecological debt', he said.

The environment wasn't the only topic on the minds of delegates at the Parliament. Other sessions and speakers looked at a range of topics including the role of religions in overcoming poverty and developing communities, peace-building and reconciliation, and indigenous issues.

American Jesuit Fr Philip Rossi was a guest speaker at the conference. The professor of theology at Marquette University in Milwaukee was a part of a panel discussion on peace in a sustainable and just world. In a presentation titled 'What is peace?', Fr Rossi explored how the Catholic liturgy helps provide a framework for thinking about just war theory.

'What would be the shape of the conduct of a community if it took seriously the transformative pattern of enactment - from strife to understanding, from hatred to mercy, from vengeance to forgiveness - that [the] Eucharistic prayer calls upon God to effect?' he asked. 'Is this not a prayer that the community become, through the transformation for which it prays that God effect in it, nothing less than an "enactor of peace"?''

Many others also came to take part in discussions aimed at finding ways for people of different religions to live together in peace and harmony. John Prust, a student from Jesuit-run Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry in the United States, was there as part of a project bringing together young people from 15 different seminaries across North America to participate in sessions called 'Building Leaders for a Religiously Diverse World'.

'We're constantly going to be around people from different religious traditions, and it's important to understand them and be able to talk about them', he said.

By Michael McVeigh

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