

**Faith in Food Workshop**

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Chair Christopher Stopes – EcoS Consultancy

Speakers Patrick Holden - Soil Association  
Martin Palmer - Alliance of Religions and Conservation  
Brian Cuthbertson – Diocese of London  
Alison Prout – Quaker Peace and Service  
Ranchor Prime – The Hinduism and Ecology Working Party

**Introduction by the Chair**

Christopher welcomed the 50 – 60 delegates and introduced the workshop session, outlining the aims and aspirations of the Faith in Food project and providing a context for the initiative. He talked of the first FiF workshop at the 2009 Soil Association conference and of the developments with various project partners including Ranchor Prime and Martin Palmer. He described his involvement in the ARC event at Windsor in November 2009 and what an inspiration this had been. His introduction placed food at the centre of our hearts and lives and expanded the title to include faith in nature.

**Patrick Holden**

Patrick talked very personally of his own journey to integrate and inner and outer life. He talked of the connection between outer change and the inner dimension and how this inner connection gives meaning to our outer work, however difficult it is to hold these two positions simultaneously. He talked about the history of the Organic Movement and how Lady Eve Balfore established the association to explore the inter-connectedness of soil, food and health. Patrick felt that the FiF initiative was an important part of the re-ignition of this central tenet of the work of the Soil Association.

**Martin Palmer**

Martin introduced the possibilities that arise when the world faith groups work together – something that until recently hadn't happened at all over the past 30 years. He talked of the ARC event at Windsor and how this has stimulated all of the faith groups and communities to look deeper into their teaching and this includes their connection with nature. Since the Windsor gathering each Faith has produced a statement reviewing their divine command to work with nature and develop their practice. He talked about how religions are teachings *and* businesses and gave some very interesting statistics about the size and wealth of the worlds faith groups, but continued by saying that we are moved by things deeper than statistics... we are touched in our hearts not our heads and therefore profound changes need to be made from within. It is not what we are against but what we are in favour of that has the power to change. Faiths don't lobby, they sustain – faiths think in generations and can therefore touch us at a pace that we can receive... not 18-month campaigns like the environmental sector. He encouraged the group to stop religions inventing ecology and the environmental movement becoming a religion. Martin said we can do this if we work together.

## **Brian Cuthbertson**

The publication Church and the Earth 2009, does not include anything on food and yet food is mentioned everywhere. Brian asked how we manage the local vs. fair trade issue. And Martin offered the ratios that ARC advocate. 30% fresh, 50% organic, 20% local.

Brian said he felt there was a need for balance.

## **Alison Prout**

Alison asked what would a SA /ARC / Quaker partnership look like? She stressed how living simply and sustainably is very important for Quakers and she mentioned Woodbrooke the Quaker Retreat and Study Centre in Birmingham where all the dried goods are organic and there is always home produced food and vegetables from the garden on the menu. Also the Quaker Centre in London, which has an ambitious and serious food policy. Over 400 people eat here every day. Alison stressed that there was a great commitment and energy in Quaker groups for this work. She offered to assist the project and would be happy to promote the values of the SA. Quakers support coherence – everyone is able to be involved within all the meeting houses at all levels, however there is a dislike of explicitly expressing the Quaker spiritual values around food. There is an interest in putting in an accreditation scheme or perhaps sign up to the FFLP.

## **Ranchor Prime**

Ranchor has been involved in the Hindu community for 40 years. 1972 was a key date for the arrival of Hindus from East Africa. Now there are 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Hindus in Britain and this length of time has brought sufficient security to begin to think about change rather than simply survival. There are a number of new initiatives around ecology and this is becoming a very important part of the changes in the British Hindu community. All beings, plants and animals have an equal right to live on Mother Earth and this is expressed through non-violence – we don't have the right to interfere with the lives of other beings but Ranchor asks is it possible to feed ourselves without killing animals?

He talked of the dairy farm and the new cattle housing at the Bhaktivedanta Manor but also how important it is to connect the Hindu value system with the supermarket shop.

## **Summing up from the speakers**

**Alison Prout** Not much to say except thank you

**Brian Cuthbertson** Jesus said life is more than food therefore our discussions aren't an end in themselves.

**Ranchor Prime** The morality of putting chemicals on soil? This is a moral question... what is our relationship with the soil?

**Martin Palmer** The theology question is interesting. The theology of land – what is the reason and purpose of land? Religions tell stories, theologies are narratives in themselves and this is our strength – our stories are told at festivals. At a time of celebration we think about the earth. Theologies are life affirming. How do we ground ourselves sufficiently to be sustainable? We need to maintain contact on 4 levels – contact with God, contact with self, contact with our neighbour and contact with the earth. We are in a spiritual crisis as we cannot sustain ourselves.

**Patrick Holden** Summed up by raising the question about partnership... where are we going from here?

**Christopher Stopes** rounded off the discussion and the session from the chair thanking everyone present and remarking how moved he was by the project. Participants were invited to add their name to a contact sheet.