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THE ECOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL GIFTEDNESS OF JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE – A Lecture Dedicated to the 70th Anniversary of the Seelisberg Conference

The focus of this presentation is to explore the ecological implications of interreligious dialogue implicit in the Seelisburg document and explicated in the Berlin document. The urgency for such insights and contributions from our respective traditions becomes more pressing in the light of the global crisis facing our planet.

Description:

This presentation is in three parts.

In the first I offer a very brief reflection on the global crisis facing humanity. We see this in the unusual weather phenomena and weather patterns experienced in different parts of the world. More recently, we are aware of floods and earth movements that have devastated communities. We also know of environmental degradation that occur because of interests shaped by economic and production interest. I offer a local Australian example, the dying of parts of the Great Barrier Reef, one of the most beautiful natural phenomena on this planet.

In a second, I reflect on the two of the most important Christian-Jewish documents that have shaped interfaith relations in the past 70 years.

- The first is the 1947 Seelisburg document. Given the context in which this document was formulated, in the wake of the Second World War, humanitarian interests were naturally to the fore. The document reflects this as its formulators address Christians to reflect upon and renew their appreciation of their Jewish roots, as these are seen in their theological understanding and liturgical worship. While the anthropocentric focus of the 10 points of Seelisburg is explicit, there is also an environmental implication that undergirds them that can now be recovered, albeit implicitly and in hindsight.
- My main focus in this second part of my presentation, and perhaps most time in my paper, will be spent on the 2009, ICCJ Berlin Document 'A time for Recommitment'. The Berlin document reflects a greater awareness of environmental and ecological issues. These revolve around an explicit understanding of the importance of the land, as inhabited locus of peoples, and Earth, as an ecological network that requires care and stewardship. These unique ecological perspectives surface at 4 of its 12 points: at points 4, 8, 10 and 12. I shall study these in greater detail.

In the third section of the paper, I explore how one particular Christian tradition, Roman Catholicism, can contribute to interreligious dialogue through offering explicit eco-theological insights gleaned from its tradition. I shall draw upon recent teachings of Pope Francis and his 2015 Encyclical, *Laudato Si*. Amongst many things, Francis emphasises four aspects that have implications for Jewish-Christian and interfaith dialogue environmentally considered: He critiques anthropocentrism, the profit motive that has shaped our use of the earth, the need to exercise compassion for earth and its people, and the importance of mutual responsibility. In these last two themes, exercising compassion and the necessity of recovering mutual responsibility, Francis lays the ground for what can be the agenda for future interreligious dialogue and cooperation. This returns us to what began implicitly in 1947 at Seelisberg and become explicit in 2009 at Berlin.

Language: English

Audience: Academics, Practitioners, Volunteers in J-C dialogue / grassroots

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