

12th Annual Nottingham Ecumenical Commission Conference 18th – 20th June 2010

The Nottingham Diocese Ecumenical Commission hosts an annual conference which is open to all denominations, as a way of bringing together like minded people to enjoy each other's company and to take part in open discussions where all opinions are respected. It is led by a guest speaker, who is invited by the commission. Prayer is an important part of the time together. It is held at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick and is a three day residential weekend. This was the twelfth such event and it remains a successful and interesting weekend for all who attend.

This year our conference was lead by Fr. Diarmuid O'Murcho, a member of the Sacred Heart Missionary Order and a social scientist who has spent his working life in social ministry, counselling couples, HIV victims, the bereaved and the homeless. As a workshop leader he has worked all over the world facilitating programmes on Adult Faith Development. His ideas are quite radical but certainly worth listening to - The title '**Catching up with Jesus**' was a mysterious one, but we were all there with an open mind, ready to listen to what this unassuming man had to say.

Our first session was Friday evening – after we had met up with old friends and dined together- followed by three more on Saturday and one on Sunday morning. Diarmuid began by suggesting that in today's climate we need an adult focus on the Kingdom of God and we need to reclaim it as the kernel of our faith –Christianity no longer focuses on the 'good news' but on "the power of the cross", and the fulfilment of paradise through this power . Jesus said "Today you will be with me in paradise" and we need to get back to the view that paradise is something that we should be working towards every day of our lives, that it isn't something "beyond this life" but rather is part of our DNA- to be improved upon constantly.

He talked about the cultural context both of our faith now and in the time of Jesus. Kingship in the time of Jesus concentrated on government and control from on high. Jesus on the other hand subverted the culture of power with a new strategy of empowerment, he taught unconditional love. He used the parables to subvert the attitudes of the time, e.g.: The Good Samaritan; The tax collector; the wedding feast – these are all stories about inclusion of people left on the margins of society. Was He going against the traditions of the time to show us a 'new way'? Diarmuid suggested that Jesus' coming is about the culmination of all that humans have achieved; it affirms, confirms and celebrates humanity. He teaches us that we can evolve grace-filled potential through creativity, spirituality and by our mistakes - the world is not perfect and neither are we. We need to strive to be more human and through the striving become more 'divine'. And we can start by being more in tune with nature - we need to reclaim our place in nature rather than hold power over it. We need to learn to have respect and not try to dominate everything around us.

Something that Diarmuid has always to include for his American audiences is "Is the Jesus story compatible with the New Cosmology" as they have a huge conflict with this and the creation story.....In the Christian tradition the Incarnation of Christ happened 2000 years ago at what we celebrate as the Nativity. With what we know of the development of our planet through the scientists and archaeologists today we have a very different view of how it all came into being, and with this knowledge we must consider whether or not the current idea of Jesus not manifesting himself into our lives until just over two thousand years ago is a valid one. The Holy Spirit was there at the 'Big Bang' and has been in the whole of creation for ever. So, perhaps we should not limit Jesus to our own time frame.

Our final session on Sunday morning looked at "Discerning Gospel wisdom in the Power of Poetry -Diarmuid came late to poetry writing and found it a very effective way of getting his thoughts into order and looking at the gospel stories from a modern viewpoint, taking into account our more extensive knowledge of the creation story and the lives of those who were around at the time of the gospels, and his book "**Jesus in the Power of Poetry**" (**published by The Crossroad Publishing Company Ltd in 2009**) is well worth a read!

This is just a very small taster of the discussions that took place- if you want to know more you can read Diarmuid's book "**Catching up with Jesus**" (**published by The Crossroad Publishing Company Ltd in 2005**)

Sandra Endsor

www.stalbansderby.org.uk

www.thechurchonoakwood.org