

LETTER FROM THE VICAR

Hello,

I had in mind this year to encourage a Christmas for Creation. This came out of a sense that our everyday lives have not yet found the balance point for us all living together sustainably on one planet, so the extra activity around Christmas is an extra burden. Into this thinking came 'Rang tan in my bedroom' a YouTube poem that might have been an advert but didn't make it to broadcast. This fits with a Christmas for Creation as it is about the damage to Orangutan's habitat from unethically sourced palm oil.

The fallout from the reception of this advert reminds me that a Christmas for relationships with others is just as important. The argument developed as follows: a company which vets adverts to make sure they fit broadcasting rules for this country realised that it would not be suitable as an advert; a storm broke out via Twitter and email where the company was blamed for doing its job as if it made the rules in the first place; protest turned into abuse; 3,000 emails; 3,500 tweets; the company had to take pictures of its staff off the internet and take down its Facebook page because of the level of abuse. I can't imagine the people assaulted in this way will be fully recovered to enjoy their own Christmas.

This reminded me how much more dangerous anger is in our high-speed world. Outrage at something which is wrong quickly transferred to abuse to people doing perfectly normal and ethical jobs that help keep our advertising at a reasonably high standard. Once, the angry people would have written an angry letter to the company; now through Facebook and Twitter there is a storm of personal abuse. This is not to say that anger is wrong but that rightly directed anger addresses the issue of unethical palm oil — it shouldn't be dumped on the people who just happen to be nearby.

And this brings me to my closing thought that the traditional idea of Peace at Christmas has a great deal to say to both creation and our ways of relating to others. Peace with Creation means not overloading it with our demands. Peace with others means not giving in to desires to focus our outrage on the easiest target.

And so I wish you a Peaceful Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.

Lorraine

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