

## **Building a More Sustainable Civilisation**

*Johan Bergström-Allen*

The Ebor Lectures on Theology and Public Life aim to respond to the growing need for theology to interact with issues facing contemporary society. Since they began in 2006, prominent thinkers from across Britain have addressed a wide variety of issues, promoting dialogue with a range of communities.

On 21<sup>st</sup> May outspoken parliamentarian Clare Short delivered the final lecture in the 2007-08 series. Her topic was *Apocalypse Now – Global Equity and Sustainable Living, the Preconditions for Human Survival*.

During the lecture, delivered to a packed audience in the splendour of York Minster, Clare Short spoke about the way that the term “apocalypse” is often used to mean the end of planet Earth, but recalled that apocalyptic writings in the Bible and the mystical tradition reveal the prophets’ view of the apocalypse as God’s justice taking place in the future. With wars, climate change and global poverty, we live in a seemingly apocalyptic age, but at the same time the prospect of the end of the world might remind people of faith about God’s ultimate purpose and the need to respond positively to the challenges of our time.

During the hour-long lecture, Ms. Short stressed the reality of the threats facing human civilisation and the environment in which we live, but argued that instead of being pessimistic the proper response of people of good will is to build a more sustainable and just world order. “Our present way of life has become decadent, destructive, and unhappy,” she opined, “and the challenge is to build a new, more moral, sustainable and generous civilisation”.

Clare Short was Secretary of State for International Development from 1997 until her resignation from the British government in 2003 over the Iraq war, and in 2006 she resigned the Labour whip to sit as an independent M.P. Having represented the constituency of Birmingham Ladywood since 1983, she will retire from parliament at the next general election.

Ms. Short’s lecture will be published along with the others in the 2007-08 series. The Ebor Lectures will resume in the autumn of 2008. The lectures are an ecumenical project that seeks to exchange insights between academic and religious traditions, and to build bridges between church and other religious groups. The lectures are co-sponsored by the British Province of Carmelites, York Minster, York St. John University, the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber, and the York Institute for Community Theology.

The Ebor Lectures are organised by a committee on which Fr. Wilfrid McGreal, O.Carm., served until this year when, following his election as Prior Provincial, he asked Fr. Tony Lester, O.Carm., to take his place.

For further information about the Ebor Lectures, please visit:  
[www.yorks.ac.uk/eborlectures](http://www.yorks.ac.uk/eborlectures)



Lay Carmelite Johan Bergström-Allen (facing) at the Ebor Lecture reception chatting with good friends of the Carmelites in York: (l-r) Louise Hampson (Director of *York Minster Revealed*), Rev. Dr. Jonathan Draper (York Minster's Canon Theologian), Dr. Chris Maunder (specialist in Marian Studies at York St. John University)



Rt. Hon. Clare Short, M.P., with the Ebor Lectures organising committee, including (back row right) Carmelite friars Wilfrid McGreal and Tony Lester.  
Photography by Michael Garnett.