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Chapter 8: Faith in Ethical Consumption

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Introduction: Faith and Social Action

This chapter traces significant interconnections between faith-motivated activists and the widening participation in fair trade activities in and around the city of Bristol in the UK. Despite the attempts of institutionalised religion to demonstrate the contrary (see, for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, 1985) "faith" and "the city" have often been awkward bedfellows within social science narratives. Disciplines such as human geography, for example, have developed rather uncontroversial geographies of religion, marking out both *geographies of difference* in which religion poses as an aspect of ethnicity or political factionalism (Guelke, 2006), and *geographies of landscape and place* involving both formal and informal spaces of the sacred (Kong, 2001). Beyond safe havens such as these, however, human geography's account of the groups and individuals identified with faith and / or religion has often been characterised by embarrassment, suspicion or hostility. "Faith" has become easily essentialised as fundamentalist, proselytising, politically conformist and integrally immersed with the workings of the capitalist state, and as such, it has been framed as an object of critique rather than a legitimate source of explanation and understanding (Cloke, 2002).

Contra to this environment of negative critique, there is evidence to suggest that faith-motivation should be taken more seriously as a context of potentially progressive activism.

First and foremost, there is now a body of work from social movement scholars that demonstrates the importance of faith-activism in a number of spheres. For example, research on the civil rights movement (Morris, 1984), the Central American peace movements (Smith, 1996), the Polish Solidarity movement (Osa, 2003) and the US faith-based community action movement (Warren, 2001; Warren and Wood, 2001; Wood, 2002) has emphasised the centrality of religious morality as a political motivator capable of shaping individual and collective activist identities, and the importance of religious organisations and resources as enablers of political activism. Local religious congregations have been found to offer both a basis for the development of social capital that aids community development, and a politicisation of that social capital (Slessarev-Jamir, 2004). Larger scale religious organisations provide both historical frameworks for collective action and leadership around which such action can take place. Evidence from the UK has emphasised multi-faith and interfaith involvement in community regeneration (Harris et al, 2005; Jackson and Kimberlee, 2004) pointing to the potential of faith communities to engage in urban transformation (Farnell, 2001; Farnell et al, 2003) and to blur the boundaries between the public, the private and the personal through engagements with political and social governance (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008). Broadly speaking, then, it can be argued from this evidence that faith can provide a context and a motivation for political involvement, and sometimes progressive political involvement. More specifically, this body of research suggests two interesting mechanisms by which wider faith-concerns become channelled into particular issues. First, Williams and Blackburn's (1996) study of Operation Rescue in the US argues that single-issue political involvement (in this case anti-abortion protests) can represent a symbolic expression of wider concerns and genres of political action (in this case nonviolent direct action) that are motivated by faith. Action can thus become a *symbolic context* for faith. In similar vein, Orton (2006) demonstrates the

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role of particular political issues as "creative spaces" in which the potential of faith communities can be harnessed. Action can thus become a *practical channel* through which faith is practised, and the socially active potential of faith is released. Overall, then this evidence suggests that whether in providing an agency of justice and welfare to slum-dwellers (Davis, 2004), establishing services for homeless people (Cloke et al, 2005), or more generally embodying a transformative theology of social engagement through the emergence of radical urban congregations (Gibbs and Bolger, 2006), faith-groups can be seen to be a significant presence in the landscape of contemporary social action.

Other evidence also emphasises the need to take faith-motivation seriously. For example, some of the key thinkers of materialist socialism have variously accepted the need to invoke forms of theology in their ongoing ontological eagerness to avoid idealism (see Milbank, 2005). Perhaps most significantly, the intervention of Jurgen Habermas (2002) has pointed to the emergence of a so-called 'post-secular' society in which religion as a repository of transcendence has an important role to play. Habermas argues that religious values of, for example, love, community and godliness can help to offset the global dominance of individual acquisitiveness and competitive consumerism. However, it is not Habermas alone that has been referencing religion in the search for hope amongst materialism: Derrida (1996) uses negative theology to sustain his thesis involving the openness of signs and the absolute nature of the ethical command; Badiou (2006) celebrates the revolutionary event of the arrival of divine grace in the world bringing with it the universal offer of forgiveness and love; and Zizek (2001) embraces the idea of love which transcends desire, through the historical emergence of Christ and Christ-likeness. That these philosophers of contemporary socialism have taken a theological turn in search

of their geographies of hope, suggests that it is worth looking seriously at the activities of contemporary faith-proponents in their application of "hopeful" theologies.

Moreover, faith, belief and religion have been strongly implicated in the capacity to be prophetic and potentially subversive in contemporary society. Across different denominations, the call to the church has been to become more prophetic, by questioning whether its current prophetic voice has been co-opted into the culture of the day (Brueggemann, 2001). While in some of its guises, Christian social practice has a decaying look which is virtually synonymous with liberal bourgeois ethics (Blond, 2005; Prochaska, 2006), elsewhere social action is being discursively decoupled from "politics" and instead the *ethics* of Christianity are being presented as a practical place to stand in order to seek to negate dominant cultural discourses and practices (Myers, 2003). In particular, ethical practices – such as engagement with fair trade – provide the opportunity for "action-as-testimony" (Williams, 2005) in which participatory action witnesses to, and makes present in representation, key social objectives such as neighbour-love and environmental stewardship. Such testimony is, as Williams suggests, "most meaningful when least concerned to dominate." (p. 2) Thus denominationally (Flint and Kearns, 2004), nationally (Ebaugh et al, 2005) and locally (Jackson and Kimberlee, 2004) there are suggestions that faith-based action on behalf of local and distant others is being rejuvenated in parts of the contemporary church, and that far from being quaintly outdated, faith-based reforming initiatives may represent an important intervention in the new cartographies of the contemporary city.

Ethical Consumption

The empirical work discussed in this paper draws on an extensive research programme on the subjects and spaces of ethical consumption funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and Arts and Humanities Research Council. The research has undertaken two principal strands of empirical work – focus groups with a range of consumers in the city of Bristol, and interviews with key actors in a series of different ethical campaigns both in Bristol and at a national level – in order to investigate both how ethical consumption is governed, and how consumers govern their ethical selves. We suggest that consumption is not only a "venue for political action" (Micheletti, 2003) but also an arena in and through which people learn the meanings of what it is to act morally and ethically (Barnett et al, 2005a). In the paper, we focus on one of the ethical campaigns studied in the research – the promotion of fair trade products – and on the role of people who connect their involvement in fair trade with a profession of Christian faith. We suggest that fair trade acts as a device through which some Christians learn to act morally, and that complex fusions of faith and politics serve to motivate what is often a faith-led initiative in establishing a campaigning presence for fair trade in and around the city.

Our research is founded on ideas about virtue ethics, a strand of normative ethics that emphasises virtues, or moral characteristics, as deep-seated dispositions for certain kinds of action. Emphasis on virtues has brought about a shift of focus in the understanding of ethics from questions of "what I ought to do" to "what kind of person do I strive to be?" Previously, consequentialist and deontological ethics (see Singer, 1997) worked to explain forms of altruism which were able to overcome the obstacles of self-interest, but the acknowledgement of virtue ethics has prioritised attention to the awakening of enlightened

self-interest in caring for others (see Barnett et al, 2005b), and in particular to the habits and practices through which virtues are learned. Consumption is understood as one moment in a range of wider everyday practices (Warde, 2004) and so our concern here is with the relationship between practices, consumption and broader conceptions of the "good" life. Although there is evidence that "ethical" consumers are often motivated by a strong sense of personal integrity which connects the individual to a deeper moral self through key ethical practices (Allahyari, 2000), ethical consumption should not be narrowed to the preserve of a privileged group of affluent consumers who practice ethics as a form of social distinction and moralistic discourse. As Miller (1998) has demonstrated, consumption per se is neither moral nor immoral; it is merely a medium of ethical conduct which is just as likely to involve ordinary everyday ethics of localised care as costly displays of moral selving. So our research has sought to understand different ways in which practice, consumption and "good" come together, and faith-based proponents of fair trade provide an interesting example of just such a nexus.

Faith in Consumption

There has been a long historical tradition of faith-based social action in Britain, from church provision of welfare in the Catholic middle ages, through the philanthropic movement of the 19th Century, to the recent resurgence of evangelical social action in current times. Recent work on the provision of services for homeless people, for example, suggests that faith-based ethos underpins the majority of organisations and individual volunteers in this particular sector (Cloke at al, 2005; Cloke et al,2007). The acknowledgement of faith influence in consumption, however, has been more reticent. Miller (1998) has noted that within the currently largely secular society, almost all of us

still recognise ourselves as living our lives according to the goals and values that remain somehow higher than the simple dictates of instrumentality. Accordingly, he argues, we use accounts to understand each other's actions which depend on "the continued existence of cosmology as a realm of transcendant value" (2004, 254), accounts, for example, of 'love' which is a powerful but often neglected foundation of shopping practices. Miller's appreciation of the transcendental nature of the "good" in life is somewhat conditioned by his framing of secularism, yet it is possible to argue that transcendental religious faith may well act as a foundation for practice and a context for accounts of how some people live their lives. In this paper we focus on Christian faith (itself non-ubiquitous), but we acknowledge the wider contexts of faith-practice in other religions and spiritual movements. In adopting this focus we want to suggest, therefore, that accounts of Christian faith will in some circumstances inform practices of (ethical) consumption.

To some extent, Christian ethics have historically been associated with practices of public moralising and demonising of various forms of participation (unwitting or otherwise) in consumer culture (see Schreiter, 1997). As Campbell (1998) emphasises, the puritan Christian inheritance has encouraged successive generations to privilege work over leisure, thrift over spending and deferred gratification over gratification of the moment. Pleasurable consumption has therefore been targeted by Christian moralists, and such hostility is maintained in many fundamentalist quarters of Christian religion, at least in a theoretical sense. Moralising over consumption has also been associated with evangelical tendencies to proselytise all and sundry by any means possible (Dionne and Chen, 2001). However, more recently, Christian ethics have displayed a more post-secular sensibility (Coles, 1997), turning from judgementalism to the pursuit of Christian 'virtue', and mirroring the question of "what kind of (Christian) person do I strive to be?" As Wilber

(1998) notes, moral codes have not been dispensed with. Excessive consumption in the face of worldwide need and suffering is still likely to be regarded as morally unacceptable, and consumption as a primary goal of human achievement will still be viewed as detrimental to human dignity. However, such codes are being expressed increasingly in terms of practices which can achieve the inculcation of more appropriate moral values, acknowledging that ethical behaviour and self interest are not mutually exclusive. Thus, grand theological imperatives, to contest the powers and forces of destruction as a redemptive challenge (Myers, 2003; Gorringe, 2004), to develop a deeper prophetic agenda as a questioning of societal norms (Wallis, 2001) and to maintain a critical and adverse relationship with established institutions (Tinder, 1989) are being twinned with questions of everyday practice – how to act on Christian principles, to perform Christian identities, to embed religious emotion into changing practice (Wynn, 2005).

This changing focus of Christian ethics is contextualised by Lyon (2000) within a wider crisis of modernity, which Christianity has helped to develop, and from whose consequences Christianity is struggling to extricate and exempt itself. An inherent part of the struggle is to forge alternatives consistent with what Moe-Lobeda (2004) terms "justice-making, self-respecting, neighbour-love" and "regenerative Earth-human relations", (these representing the key moral norms of Christian faith). Neighbour-love, for example, has become more difficult because the increasingly indirect relations in the 'society of strangers' render neighbours less visible. As Lyon argues:

> "The point…..is to take responsibility for the other wherever she or he is
> encountered. How this is worked out in the society of strangers, living under

the sign of mobility, is a crucial question. The everyday challenge of consumerism has yet to be fully acknowledged by most Christian communities. (p. 145).

Over the intervening nine years, this assessment may have proved to be a little gloomy. Major campaigns in Britain, such as Jubilee 2000 and Make Poverty History (2005) have benefited from the founding influences of Christian organisations, leading to the suggestion that faith-groups can become 'the conscience of the world' (Wallis, 2005). We need to recognise, of course, that these campaigns actually drew support across the spectrum of faith and non-faith motivation. More specifically, an evaluation of the current state of fair trade by Nicholls and Opal (2005) recognises the contribution of organised religion, particularly Christianity, both to grass-roots events and to national-level initiatives. In Britain, Christian groups have been behind the establishment of both Traidcraft (and its very successful Café Direct product lines) and the Fairtrade Foundation, which have been highly significant in the rise of fair trade awareness and activity. Moreover, key actors such as Bruce Crowther, architect of the Fair Trade Town campaign, are reported as expressing strong religious beliefs. In the USA, fair trade has been pioneered by Christian Mennonite organisations, and awareness of fair trade issues has been raised by the Interfaith Coffee Program which has brought fair trade coffee and fair trade issues into church fellowship hours after worship across America. This kind of evidence suggests that faith-ethics are, in part, being practised in the consumption arena, and that to an extent the challenge of consumerism is beginning to be addressed. In the remainder of this paper, we direct attention to these phenomena at the scale of a city and its environs, investigating the role of Christian faith in the coming together of practice, consumption and 'good' life. What we suggest is that faith can be seen in various ways to shape consumption, but that by the same token, consumption can be seen to be shaping faith.

Faith and Ethical Consumption in Bristol

What follows draws on a series of 20 interviews with people in and around Bristol who have a significant involvement with Traidcraft, an organisation founded on Christian principles to distribute fairly trade food, household and craft products throughout the UK. Traidcraft's initial system for distributing and promulgating its products was through a series of local representatives – Fair Traders – who volunteered to sell stocks of fair trade goods in their area, as well as to distribute mail order catalogues and generally raise awareness of fair trade issues. Most Fair-Traders have been church-based, and some have gone on to become Key Contacts – providing wholesaling and information services for Fair Traders working at a smaller scale. Although this distribution system continues, Traidcraft have also sought to 'mainstream' their activities through significant involvement in fair trade product lines (Café Direct, Tea Direct, GeoBars etc) which are marketed through supermarkets, and via an increasingly important campaign organisation working nationally and internationally to lobby on fair trade concerns (see Barnett et al, 2005a).

Our interviews were designed to inform a range of issues, not least an innovative box delivery scheme for Traidcraft goods in a group of commuter villages south of Bristol. However, for the purposes of this paper we have interrogated these interview materials to trace different connections between Christian virtue ethics and practices of fair trade consumption. What we have found is complex and multi-faceted, but we suggest that three arenas stand out as significant loci for interaction between faith and fair trade. First, fair trade presents an important device by which Christians can enact aspects of their faith, and thereby work out what it is to practice faith-virtue ethics in consumption. Fair trade works

as both a symbolic expression of wider faith-related concerns, and as a practical channel through which faith can be materialised and practised. Secondly, opportunities to practice fair trade are communicated and demonstrated especially significantly within particular social networks and notably churches, in which opportunities are afforded for the promulgation of virtue-ethics in everyday life practices. Faith-groups therefore offer important organisational forms and resources with which to enable ethical and political action. Thirdly, these social networks are often energised by what we might term 'evangelists' – energetic and persuasive individuals who present potentially governing repertoires of fair trade practices that reflect appropriate faith-ethics in church networks. In detailing these themes in turn we would want to emphasise the potential diversity of these faith networks. Not only do different denominational proclivities attach differently to fair trade activities, but also churches themselves are wrapped up in forms of consumerism whereby church-goers will often carefully choose which church best suits their preferences. Equally, and relatedly, fair trade evangelists will variously be bringing faith into the political realm <u>and</u> politics into these faith-networks. Such differences will be significant in the interpretation of these three broad themes.

(i) Personal Faith and Virtue Ethics in Fair Trade

Narrating the importance of faith in everyday practice to an interviewer-stranger can involve a range of personal strategies including using code-phrases to summarise a faith-aspect, or even a taking-for-granted that the interviewer would 'get' the connection without it having to be spelt out. What follows, then, is a necessarily partial account of interview passages where accounts of participation in fair trade intersected with spoken-about issues of faith and conscience. Several respondents stated a clear relationship between ethical practice and Christian or church-based values:

'he teachings from the Bible are that you should treat everyone the same….there's lots of stories in the Bible that just say you should treat everyone as your neighbour, not just the person you like…..So think about people you don't know, and the rest of the world you don't know properly' (Ray).

'as Christians we should be supporting Fair Trade …we shouldn't be exploiting other people' (Sue).

'I want that Christian good without a shadow of a doubt' (Hazel).

'I am motivated basically by Christian faith…I know about these things, I know I have an ability to do something about it, and therefore I have a responsibility to do what I can' (Edna).

'I know that there's a choice between something that is fairly traded or a similar cheaper or more convenient item…and sometimes I do hesitate, but I do wonder, how would I explain it? Because I do think I will have to explain myself….It's a good job we've got a conscience' (Stephen).

Interestingly, these various expressions of Christian values emphasise different relationships, between self and needy other, self and God, self and other Christians and self and self-conscience. In this way motivation to practice fair trade is only intermittently expressed in terms of a connection with distant others, and may indeed be about

responsibility / love within close social networks and devotionally to God, rather than about producers in developing countries. Most likely, although rarely expressed all at once, Christian motivation reflects all of these things together, a sort of practical way of living life as a Christian in such a way as to deal with, at least in part, contemporary problems of consumerism.

> 'As a Christian, it is just the way I want to lead my life…and I don't want to have any truck really with the things that I don't morally agree with' (Ann-Marie).

> 'To do something practical, I think that's always been the basis of it…this idea of living by example' (Emma).

Some respondents attributed specific background characteristics as formative to their current interests and practices in fair trade. Emma, for example, told us that her grandparents used to buy Traidcraft products when they first came onto the scene, so her awareness of their availability turned into learned behaviour when she left home and found her own church that had a Traidcraft Fair Trader in its midst. Ronnie similarly pointed to her convent school upbringing and her subsequent espousal of Catholic social justice as reasons why her Christian ethos was currently practiced through fair trade. Others narrated aspects of their own personality and identity which contributed to their current ethical practice. For Stephen, nascent political interests from an early age in conjunction with his self-evaluated character ('I am a bit serious minded and I very easily plug into these things') augmented his Christian ethos as prompts to action. Liz spoke of a highly tuned social conscience which transcends faith; importantly she recognises similar values in her non-Christian husband:

'If I wasn't a Christian I would still support fairtrade, because I have a social conscience and I care about people and I don't think its right that they should be taken advantage of …..as a Christian you are given a moral framework, you learn what's right and wrong and I suppose that is where my sense of social justice comes from. But my husband isn't a Christian and he feels like that too' (Liz).

This demonstrates a fascinating mix of learned Christian ethics which are practised both inside and outside church, and alongside a partner with similar but secular beliefs. We have no evidence as to whether fair trade practice was passed on to her husband, who accepted the practice but not the associated Christian ethical premise, but we know of other examples where this has been the case. Finally, Susan told us that her adoption of Zen Catholicism "supported my own ethical judgements" – perhaps illustrating the religious consumerism discussed by Lyon (2000), but perhaps also emphasising the possibility that faith offers a suitable vehicle for pre-existing political traits.

The suggestion from virtue ethics that ethical involvement is usually twinned with enlightened self-interest is given credence in these interviews. Emma's involvement in selling fair trade in her local church 'helped improve confidence' and allowed her to 'get to know the people in church a bit more because I know them by name and talk to them a bit more'. For Ray, the impetus to be involved with fair trade came in the aftermath of personal illness:

'I've always believed in fair trade…..but it didn't happened solely because of my beliefs. It happened because I had spare time on my hands, and our church had just started…Traidcraft'

In different ways, then, the symbolic and practical 'device' offered by Traidcraft permitted involvement of varying intensity and faith-based motivation in a way of practising Christian virtue ethics. In some cases, involvement appears to have been a reflexive and rational response to ideas about what is 'good' in life, following a theological or performative model. At other times, however, fair trade practices seem to have been happened on rather less deliberately, although rarely as casually as when Sue started to introduce coffee mornings in her Methodist Church in order to raise funds for a church hall project she was involved in, and she thought she might as well support fair trade as a minor part of the bigger venture. Fair trade in such cases represents but one of a number of competing devices available for the embodiment and practice of faith-based ethics, and respondents sometimes admitted to feeling 'guilty' and 'responsible' because they were not able to donate more time and / or purchasing power to the fair trade 'cause'.

(ii) Churches as Social Networks for Fair Trade

One of the principal findings of recent investigations of social capital in cities (see, for example, Putnam, 2000), is the dramatic decline of organisations which both bond together groups within the community and bridge out to non-members in the community. Perhaps the principal exception to this trend has been the continuing presence of churches, albeit often in smaller overall numbers, as islands of buildings and volunteerism in the sea of fading social capital (Chalke, 2003). It certainly seems to be the case that fair trade services

and campaigning have been able to take root in particular places through the auspices of church social networks. Churches have come to represent 'centres' of fair trade generically, in a manner perhaps only matched by Oxfam shops, and despite wide variations in activism for fair trade within different churches, they seem to offer common social networks in and through which fair trade diffuses out into surrounding localities.

Several of our interviewees 'discovered' fair trade through the activities of Traidcraft representatives in church networks. Sarah, for example, was told about Traidcraft by a 'school-gate' parent friend:

> 'Our friends told me about it (Traidcraft), probably about ten years ago…She had known about it because of her religious…she's in Bristol Christian Fellowship, so she'll have heard about it through that'.

Sarah regularly spends £50 per month at her local church-based Traidcraft shop, and has branched out from foodstuff purchases to Christmas and craft goods, and attendance at Traidcraft fashion shows in the area. Similarly, Hazel was enrolled into fairtrade purchasing and volunteering through her local church:

> 'We have a housegroup from our local Methodist church; little groups of people meet, other than on a Sunday. And one of the guys….he said what we need to do is make people feel aware of fairly traded goods - they'd obviously sold Traidcraft at his former church – and I said well okay, I'll stick my neck out and say I'll do it for a little while. I suppose that's perhaps four years ago'.

Such direct translation into fair trade activism is rare, but in small local settings new ethical converts can quite quickly become active campaigners if the fair trade arena suits their desire to practice identity politics and ethics. The church setting can thus provide fertile territory for active faith practice. Alternatively, churches can offer a safe and respectable environment in which to experiment with issues such as fair trade which seem to some as radical and potentially contentious. Anne-Marie heard about Traidcraft in her local church and reported to us that she "feels safe buying Traidcraft" there because other people in the church who she respects have assured her of Traidcraft's respectability both to the social network of church and to individual mediators within that network:

> 'I think the great thing that the church…that being part of the church is teaching me is - the fact that we are not individuals in this world, that we are a big family' (Anne-Marie).

This metaphor of family is used to connect her Christian identity both to localised community and to an ecological vision of being part of a wider worldwide community and environment. Her part in this 'family' can safely be practised through devices such as Traidcraft. Of course we should temper any romanticised gloss implied here about 'being' church. Other respondents told of contests and struggles over issues relating to church-based fair trade – the high cost of products (when other pressing financial priorities are not being met), the anti-sabbatarian nature of Traidcraft stalls in churches, the taste of the coffee (particularly when first introduced with little choice) and so on – which suggest that church social networks vary in the ease with which they are colonised by the ideas and, perhaps were importantly, the everyday practices, of fair trade.

As well as operating as self-contained social networks, churches represent robust platforms for the dissemination of fair trade issues and products into the wider community. Sue told us that she is now well known in her area as the local contact point for fair trade:

'I supply the local primary school staffroom, and I've got another church in Portishead that has it (Traidcraft goods) on a regular basis. The Catholic church if they've got anything happening will often have goods on a sale or return basis as will the Anglican church, so its quite extensive really'.

Neither is such dissemination simply to other churches. Emma describes a spreading of the Traidcraft message through local word of mouth:

'I think it's certainly the best way of spreading the message by getting …local people to then spread it further…its kind of filtering out again, it's branding out. A lot of it is word of mouth, and friends doing this, and so and so, talking about that'.

Emma regularly runs pre-Christmas sales advertised in the village and through the school, and encounters 'different people again' through these events. Interestingly, she places considerable store by the legitimation of these events as mainstream activities in the village rather than "being some odd churchy thing". Such legitimation is a fascinating facet of using church networks to springboard fair trade out into the wider community. Often church-goers will be aware of the dangers of proselytising and may therefore be wary of their place in 'mainsteam' society. However, involvement with fair trade places them at the centre of a popular political movement, and legitimises Christian ethics vis-à-vis this mainstream. Fair trade therefore fits well with the sensibilities of a post-secular charity and

faith-based action which makes no adverse demands on its 'clients' (see Coles, 1997;

Cloke et al, 2005). Again then, the practice of virtue ethics can be seen to involve

enlightened self-interest in the midst of caring for others.

(iii) Local "Evangelists" for Fair Trade

In suggesting that churches represent local social networks in and through which fair

trade discourses and devices take root and flourish, providing an exemplar of what it is to

behave and consume ethically, we point not only to the networks themselves but also to the

provocateurs who stimulate such activity. In terming such people 'evangelists' we are not

seeking to cross-reference their role with that of spreading the Christian gospel per se; we

merely seek to reflect the zeal and energy which empowers the spreading of the fair trade

'gospel' albeit with a Christian perspective and motivation. We have encountered several

of these key figures who become local agents for the cause, and combine practical tasks of

supplying fair trade goods and running fair trade events with a number of other roles which

involve getting the message across and converting other people to the practice and cause of

fair trade. Evangelists are therefore not only networkers, but they are advocates and

persuaders, and can quickly become active campaigners. Indeed fair trade campaigning will

often be associated with multiple campaigning for related causes and the virtue ethics they

engender.

Our interviewees gave accounts of their activism which explained their actions in terms

of a number of these evangelist roles. Ray, for example, describes herself as a 'persuader':

Ray: 'Yes, I am a persuader. I am very good at….well, I think I am….sometimes I

        embarrass my husband (laughs) in the supermarket'.

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Interviewer: 'Would you go up to random people?' (laughs).

Ray: 'Not to random people….I used to say, not loudly, but quite clearly, in the queue..that is made by Nestle, we don't buy Nestle things (laughs). Not to somebody I didn't know, you know, just to my husband or somebody I happened to know there, if I saw it in their trolley. And then if anybody said to me why, and people have, I tell them the Nestle story…And I persuade people in the church that perhaps they ought to be considering buying fairly traded products for their offices and that's grown a lot'.

It is interesting how Ray's persuasion is invariably linked with material objects and devices. The Nestle product in the supermarket trolley sparks a conversation. Consideration of using fair trade products in workplaces is prompted by a deliberate tactic of using catering packs of tea and coffee:

> 'so that I can always, you know, if people drop a comment in front of me I can say, well, I keep catering things so if you'd like I can give you a few teabags to try, just to see if you like this. And very often…..and nearly always, in fact, people will say….;oh no, if we've decided we'll go fairly traded we'll go, and take it' And off they go with their tub of coffee and big bag of forty teabags…' (laughs).

We emphasise the jocularity of this part of the interview because Ray clearly sees these devices as an opportunity to ease people humourously into her way of thinking and acting, whether they realise it or not. Laughter also defuses any potential proselytising edge to the

actions. However, the use of food and drink materiality is a clear tactic which is tailored to different networks and contacts. She continues:

> 'If we had done talks at schools, we've given just a pack of biscuits and/ or teabags to the children to take home to mum. And then sometimes the parents will then be quite happy to come out (to coffee mornings) because you always put in your little compliments slip and address…..so some mums have come that way'.

Ray insists that her customers are not all 'mums'; but it is clear from these interviews that fair trade evangelists will network strategically in their locality. The first obvious network is the home Church, which as Sue describes involves linking Christian and fair trade discourses:

> 'I don't think that you have to be a Christian to want to support fair trade, but that was the way I persuaded the people at the church that is was the right way to go, because I think it was easier for them to come to terms with it'.

Sue here suggests a transferability of discourse, and chooses between 'political' and 'Christian' accounts depending on the object of her advocacy. Other key evangelists extend their network of influence however practicable. Debbie talks about where she sets out her stall (both practically and metaphorically), including churches, village fetes, youth groups, Rainbow and Guide groups, Christmas fairs, civic events, Women's Institute and Mother's Union groups and schools. Her strategy is to respond to new opportunities and to persuade individuals within these groups to take on the task of serving that network. She describes herself as 'a networker' and a 'frustrated activist', the latter being an expression of how

time spent serving new fair trade networks limits her ability to engage in different forms of campaigning:

> 'I don't go to the campaign meetings and I don't go out on the demos…..I mean I'd love to but I don't have time. So on the practical side I feel I'm there to provide the stock, provide myself if required, and provide information if they want it, or I can point them in the direction to go'.

Debbie's 'practical' advocacy indicates an important form of fair trade evangelism, that is ensuring that the presence of fair trade goods, and the associated message, infiltrates local social networks by whatever means.

Other evangelists progress from this 'practical' persuasion into full-blown political campaigning. Edna has worked with Traidcraft for 25 years, or more, starting with a personal commitment that quickly spread into her church network:

> 'I started buying coffee just for myself, and fairly quickly became more and more convinced that this was the right thing to do and that other people ought to do it too, and started talking to people in church. And we started buying it as a group, and then it just gradually grew from there'.

Edna soon became a Key Contact for her area of Bristol, helping other Fair Traders with their stocks and events. She started off, in her words, as a 'fussy mother', but motivated by her Christian faith and by an awareness of wider political issues she harnessed both Christian and political discourse as and when appropriate:

'In a sense it's always been political, hasn't it? I mean the fact that we were going into fair trade was political, although 'political' was a bit of a dirty word within the church, because 'this is Christianity'…but my Christianity involves my whole life including politics….you can't separate the two'.

Although 80% of her sales remain church-based, she is excited by recent opportunities to 'move out of the church' by involvement with wider campaigning.

'This is one of the exciting things about all this campaigning – Jubilee 2000, Trade Justice, Make Poverty History – it means that we are that much more involved with other people, and they're more aware of us as well…'

For Edna this involves active involvement in national campaigns relating to social justice, and deliberate engagement in political rallies and demonstrations (recently in Birmingham, Cologne, Genoa, London and Edinburgh- she says: 'Sometimes I think this is mad, I mean I'm over 60 now …' Edna's reworking of the supposed Christian/ political divide is a tribute both to her personal commitment to the cause, and to the changing relationships between politics and faith which are frequently being brought together through espousal of virtue ethics. Therefore to perform a Christian identity politically has become less 'dirty' and by the same token the Christian foundations of fair trade activism have been subject to a kind of evangelism, which permits easy alliances across faith / politics divides.

Conclusions

The research reported on here suggests that faith motivation, church networks and Christian fair trade evangelists have combined to achieve an appreciable impact in particular localities. From humble beginnings, fair trade activism through Traidcraft has evolved into a significant campaigning force in and around Bristol, as in other cities in the UK. We are not suggesting that fair trade is in any way monopolised by faith-based motives, networks or ethos. There are several important examples of fair trade activism in Bristol which builds a secular focus of care, not least through a series of key fair trade businesses that have grown up in the city. Local authority activity in favour of fair trade has also been noteworthy. However, faith-based networks have proved to be the source of a remarkable scale of local involvement in this context.

The networks represent important arenas in which 'ethical' identity is modelled and learned in specific aspects of consumption. Much of the impetus for this modelling and learning stems from the work of local activists with an evangelistic outlook for fair trade practice and discourse. Although these individuals contribute different kinds of personal involvement, both in their selling and their campaigning they are crucial in setting out the stall of ethical consumption. More generally, we suggest that the role of social networks and attendant evangelists may be of wider relevance than in the specific fair trade and faith-motivated contexts discussed in this paper. The diffusion of devices and models of other virtue ethics may well also rest on the role of networks and evangelists in persuading the virtue of particular configurations of practice, consumption and 'good' living.

There are two important wider implications that flow from these findings. First, it seems likely that church-based , or wider faith-based networks can act as arenas of innovation in relation to other ethical issues. For example, there is now a significant groundswell of activity designed to persuade faith-congregations to practice more sustainable church-life, using audits of environmental practice in the collective church sphere to prompt parallel audits of individual and household practices (see, for example, Bookless, 2008; Spencer and White, 2007). As with fair trade issues, the activation of faith-networks in this respect seems likely to be connected to the particular passion and determination of particular activists, or evangelists, within that network to instigate change and diffuse pest-practice therein. Such practice will be explained in terms that will appeal to the virtue ethics of that community, here emphasising theologies of environmental stewardship and concern for creation, and will often be resourced by wider organisations such as the Christian ecology movement *A Rocha* (www.arocha.org; www.ecocongregation.org). The second implication is that this "model" of evangelists within particular networks is likely to apply in secular arenas, or in spaces where faith and secularism meet. The story of Transition Towns (www.transitiontowns.org) suggests that local networks for sustainable living are springing up where small groups of passionate enthusiasts are able to generate an infectious presence in particular places.

Finally, we suggest that this example of localised participation indicates that a significant role can be played by faith-motivated people in campaigns for progressive socio-economic reform in general, and in particular for sustainable living.. Although it is impossible to quantify, there can be a reasonable assumption that the Christian influence in organisations such as Traidcraft and the Fairtrade Foundation has served as a catalyst both for consuming fair trade goods and campaigning about fair trade issues at the local level,

and for a more aggregate move towards larger-scale political campaigning, and commercial mainstreaming of fair trade products. Far from being distracted and self-absorbed, the fair trade issue is one where Christians have found a prophetic voice, and have overcome their supposed aversion to the "political" by choosing to identify with the discourses and pathways to participation offered by *ethical* consumption. In so doing they have commonly moved beyond the walls of their churches and expressed care for both local and global neighbours. It is noteworthy that the interviews with fair trade activists did not reveal particularly strong or critical political analyses of, for example, globalisation or exploitative labour practices. These discourses tended to be subsumed within more ethical concerns about the self-other relationship. Perhaps the adoption of ethical rather than political prompts to action will be interpreted as a watering down of the religious content of involvement, but as the interviews interpreted above suggest, there remain strong theological prompts to participation in ethical consumption, even if such prompts do seem to be wrapped up in new forms of post-secular sensibility. These church-goers seem to be finding other devices, including consumption, through which to express their theological and ethical desire to be involved in acts of caritas and agape. In so doing they have in small (and indirectly perhaps in much larger) ways imprinted faith-based interventions onto the new cartographies of the city.

Again, there are implications here for sustainability more broadly. The ethical prompt to action is a powerful one at a time when more formal political distinctions are being blurred in the actions of, and opposition to government. Changing consumer behaviour in favour of more sustainable practices is a task that can happily draw on the appeal of virtue ethics as a foundational campaigning device. Despite entreaties for change aimed at individual behaviour and practice, it seems likely that existing or new social networks will be fruitful

arenas for the sparking of new ethical awareness and action. Faith networks will be involved here, both in the centripetal diffusion of faith-based sustainable ideas and devices, and in receiving and activating such ideas from other ethical evangelists whose motivation relates to secular counter-consumerist cultures. There is also evidence, again for example from the Transition Towns movement (Mason and Whitehead, 2008), that a mixing together of the secular and the faith-motivated can be mutually reinforcing in campaigns around sustainable ethics. In these kinds of ways, the initiatives and collaborations achieved in the fair trade sector can be seen as more generally applicable to wider areas of sustainable development.

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