



## LITURGY FOR WHF PRE-COP21 CYCLE CARAVAN CELEBRATION

A blur of colour and light, a rush of wind from behind. Tense leg muscles relax as cyclists crest the hill. Wheels spin on tarmac; a steady hum. Pedals beat in rhythm. Cyclists shift and sigh, a tight knit community. Bodies gently ease on the final descent. The end of this leg of the ride is in sight.

Our sacred texts all talk of order, pattern and rhythm in creation; cycles of day and night, annual seasons, ocean tides, planetary movements. Climate change relates to shifts in these cycles, a disturbance in the natural balance and inter-connectedness of creation. This impacts on the whole community of life, but the vulnerable are especially susceptible. They are least able to cope with the effects, and the ethics of our faith teachings will not allow us to ignore injustice.

This year's COP21 in Paris is just another gathering in a long string of annual events that have yielded no inspired solutions, leaving the climate change crisis more urgent than ever. Carbon emissions continue unabated. Decision-makers blindly continue to argue for ongoing economic growth and development despite evidence that this cannot be sustained. Climate change denialists are still blinkered despite rising existential and scientific proof of its reality. And people of faith, because of old habits, fear of change, or sheer inertia, protect the status quo fiercely holding on to unsustainable lifestyles and destructive patterns of behaviour despite the moral imperative to take responsible action.

So here we have the We Have Faith cycle caravan in the lead-up to this year's COP, with its deep symbolic and allegorical significance to awaken us, to pique our interest, to stir the inner misgivings hidden behind our everyday complacency. What is that we celebrate today? What is it that we confess? What is it to which we commit? What is it that we hold sacred? What do our minds and hearts, senses and spirits tell us as these cyclists pedal into our neighbourhoods, wheels spinning, muscles taut with sustained energy?

The obvious answer is that bicycles cause no carbon emissions; they don't contribute to climate change. So the moral of the story should be: Don't drive; use pedal power instead! But there are many other aspects to the symbols and analogies inherent in bicycles to awaken our insight and understanding.

The clearest and most immediate analogy is that of wheels in rotation to keep the bicycle in motion. Creation also depends on diurnal, nocturnal and seasonal cycles to keep it moving forward into the future. There are also planetary cycles, generational cycles, fauna and flora life cycles. Patterns and rhythms of life embedded in these cycles are both dynamic and transformational, yet repetitive and reliable. Similarly, balance or stability on a bicycle, for most riders, depends on keeping it in steady motion. Poorly inflated tyres or dented wheels negatively affect their rotational capacity and rhythm, demanding extra energy to keep the bicycle moving. When the balance and rhythm of earth's cycles are disturbed, this impacts negatively on the dynamic of the whole of creation. From a faith perspective, life has purpose. This demands movement and action, not stasis. It implies cyclical celebration of feasts, fasts and festivals. Most faiths celebrate cycles in life, whether agricultural, planetary, generational, traditional, or spiritual.

This leads to the next analogy. A bicycle will not move without a rider. Nor will the wheels turn if the cogs are disengaged or the chain is loose. It takes the synchronized cooperation of the cyclist's different body parts. It is the interconnectedness of all the parts, both rider and bicycle, that sets and keeps it in motion. In the web of life, it is the inter-relationships that maintain the ongoing, sustainable dynamic of creation as it moves steadily into the future. No faith community can exist without the shared life of its members, each individual combining his/her unique personality, abilities and experience to create a meaningful corporate whole.

The wheels of the bicycle are circular, so are the cogs. The motion of peddling is circular. Most mainline religions recognize circles as significant symbols in their faith, usually pointing to universality, eternity, balance, harmony, equality, wholeness, and unity. Because there is no ostensible beginning or end, this suggests eternity. Every point on the circumference is equidistant from the centre, which suggests equity and balance. The circular form suggests harmony of movement. The planetary cycles, spherical shape of the earth, and cycles of life imply wholeness or unity. However, faith communities often apply the concept of circles exclusively, denying the unity of our common humanity and fragmenting or dividing us. By isolating ourselves in this way, we become marginalized from the community of life and limit our contribution to God's creation as a whole.

A bicycle without gears or brakes could become a roller-coaster ride of horror for any cyclist. In a sense, this is what our global economic system has become. The race might be for ever higher profits and GDP, but the ride is taking us faster and faster on a downward slope with no means of changing gear or putting on the brakes. What do our respective faiths teach in this regard? Most urge contentment with what we have, concern for others and the greater good, conservative lifestyles, moderation rather than excess. So when do we, as people of faith, change gear and apply the brakes? What happens when we demand that the earth yields more and more, spinning faster and faster to satisfy our greed and exhilaration in the race? What happens to the synchrony, the harmony, the steady rhythm that holds us in balance?

Now imagine cycling in tandem. The effort is shared. There's a sense of mutuality between the two cyclists. Our faiths teach us that we do not journey alone but that God accompanies us. It is tempting to place God in front, where we can see God's efforts and pass on the responsibility of steering us in the right direction. We might even choose to sit back and lift our feet off the pedals, so God is left to do all the work! After all, we're hidden from sight, aren't we? But the truth is that God is the one who is likely to remain hidden, taking the back seat and demanding that we accept responsibility for steering and driving our own lives, while giving us the assurance that we're not alone and divine power supports our meagre human efforts.

If we're cycling in tandem with God, and we've taken proper care of our bodies and bicycles, the journey should be exemplary, our destination assured. Surely we will remain in harmony with the pulse of life, the rhythm of creation, as we journey with God and merge in unity and mutual inter-relationship as an integral part of the vast community of life?