



Read the Archbishop's lecture at United Theological College, Bengaluru, today on the theme of 'Pastoral Care in a Rapidly Changing Society'.

Thank you all so much for hosting me here, and many thanks indeed to The Reverend Dr Chilikri Vasantha Rao who has very kindly invited me to talk to you all today. It is a real pleasure to be here at United Theological College, where the motto is taken from Matthew 20:28 – not to be served, but to serve, to put it simply. It is service I would like to talk about today – our responsibility of service to the environment, particularly in a rapidly changing world where remarkable technological advances are imminent. This responsibility is hardwired into the mission of the global Anglican Communion, into our understanding of God’s holistic mission – our Fifth Mark of Mission calls each of us to “strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”

The Church of South India, as I understand, has been integrally involved in climate justice. It has recognised, to its great credit, that God’s covenant was with all creatures, not only Noah and other human beings. Indeed, I hear that the CSI, in collaboration with the Faith for Earth Initiative from the UN Environment and other organisations, organised an international conference in August at the Church of South India Synod Centre in Chennai to promote faith engagement on dealing with environmental challenges and promote climate change awareness and cultural understanding and change. I am delighted to see the CSI leading the way in caring for God’s creation – their ‘Seven Year Plan to Protect the Living Planet’ is one we could all stand to study.

The Church of South India has correctly identified that climate change is an issue of social justice. It disproportionately affects the poorest and most vulnerable around the world, often those who have done the least to contribute to change in the climate and yet have already started to bear the brunt of its devastating effects. The Irish poet W.B Yeats, widely considered to be one of the most brilliant poets of the 20th century, wrote in his poem ‘Second Coming’ that ‘things fall apart, the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’. If we do not prepare ourselves for the rapid and monumental changes coming our way - not only in terms of climate, but technological development – we too shall find that things will fall apart. The centre will not hold.

The issue

Climate change is happening. As we approach the 15th anniversary of the Indian Ocean Tsunami, that caused such devastation across the ocean, including on the shores of India, it is becoming ever clearer that climate change is already having repercussions that seem almost biblical in scope. This is why the Anglican Consultative Council has declared that we are facing a climate emergency. Floods, storms, the mass movement of people – some forced by sudden disasters, others recognising, perhaps with prophetic insight, that their way of life is being eroded at a slower but no less devastating rate and making the heart-breaking decision to find a new home elsewhere. It seems that there is too much water and at the same time there is too little water for those who need fresh water for drinking and ...Psalm 11 Verse 3 reads ‘If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?’

The philosopher Jacques Maritain said ‘We do not need a truth to serve us, we need a truth that we can serve’. As Christians, we always return to

the idea of service and truth, two of the great underpinnings of our faith. Greed and avarice are responsible for so much of the over-consumption and over-production that is having such an effect on our environment and on global communities today – isn't the counter narrative the narrative of Christian humility and service to God and his world? If you are motivated by greed, you will never have enough – you will always hunger for more and thirst for more. But if you are held by the love of Christ in the knowledge that you are enough, that other human beings are made in the image of God and the world is made for us to care for? How might that look, how might that change the way we act, produce, trade, consume and develop?

I would like to talk a little today about the changes our world is facing. A Christian response and understanding that has at its centre the dignity of every human being. India has a long and remarkable history, and it has seen and survived many changes, from the political to the technological. But the changes we have seen so far are nothing compared to what lies ahead with the imminence of extrapolating technological development in a world that becomes ever more globalised and yet ever more fragmented.

You in India have seen the effect of climate change first hand. The rise in average temperatures has seen a worrying trend of droughts followed by floods, of extreme and unpredictable weather events that have taken lives and destroyed homes and livelihoods. Data modelling predicts that continued rising temperatures will increase the frequency of flash flooding. The number of days where there is rainfall is decreasing whilst intense rainfall events of 10-15 centimetre per day are increasing. This means that more water is pouring down in less time: causing freak weather events that affect people's livelihoods around the world

The thing with the environment is that everything is absolutely interconnected. Everything has an effect on everything else. For example, floods might lead to agricultural damage, which lead to a loss of food security, perhaps an effect on trade, which in turn affects consumption and the economy. I am not saying this in order to say that trade or the economy are more important than human lives, but merely to make the point that it is not sufficient to tackle issues in silos or independently. Everything is connected, and so to deal adequately with issues of climate change we need to deal with issues of technology and biotechnology, trade and transport concurrently.

This is why I applaud the way in which the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, has approached the imminent UN Climate Action Summit. He and his team organising the Summit have identified distinct but deeply interconnected streams that require courageous and concrete responses from countries all across the world. States will not meet the necessary goals they set themselves if they think they can solve all of their issues only by investing in green and renewable technologies, or only by mobilising local communities to respond. There is a delicate web – an ecological ecosystem – that requires attention and action at every point.

The Bible/Faith Justification

Perhaps I could go back to the theme that underpins this lecture for a moment, the role and response of faith to rapid and perhaps quite scary

changes.

Our relationship with the land and our cohabitation with other creatures is raised very early on in the Bible, in Genesis. We are tasked by God to 'have dominion' over the land. The idea of domination has been interpreted by some Christians to mean that we can do whatever we want to the land – that it is ours to exercise our control and power over, whatever the cost. But the clear exhortation in Leviticus 26 'Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary' suggests that if we obey God's commands and give the land its due rest we shall have 'rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.'

If we refuse to give the land its rest and violate God's covenant, we will face vanishing harvest, droughts and famine. The task we are set in Genesis, therefore, is best considered to be one of stewardship – we are caring for God's land in gratitude, because he has given us a world that is fruitful and abundant in its beauty. As in Psalm 24, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.'

As people of faith, we cannot just say what we believe. We are then obliged to live out the life that Christ calls us to live, to care for our neighbours, for the creatures and the creation that God has so generously given us. Who amongst us has not lent something to a friend, perhaps an item of clothing, and been dismayed when they treat it shoddily, letting it get dirty or perhaps torn? Imagine then how many times worse it is that God has given us all of creation, and we have reacted by polluting His land, mistreating His people and exploiting its resources.

However, another thing the Lord teaches us is not to fear. It is so easy to let the fear of change and the unknown get on top of us. I'm sure you know that the most frequent command in the Bible is 'Do not be afraid!' Let me be clear, God isn't saying 'everything's fine, there is nothing to be afraid of, as you were' when he commands us not to fear – he is acknowledging that life is scary. Life is hard, and sometimes we are rightly afraid. But God is with us, working with us in our communities and our churches, in our politics and our governments and He will not leave us to face our fears alone. It is actually an opportunity for us to respond to God's call, to live a life that is caring and restorative - we try to respond to the challenge with optimism and perseverance, rather than the blind fear which can paralyse.

The Anglican Communion

I am fortunate enough, in my role as Archbishop of Canterbury, to travel around the provinces of the Anglican Communion and I have the chance to enjoy the remarkable diversity and richness of different cultures that are a true gift to the Church. In meeting people from around the Anglican Communion, in United and Uniting Churches and in other denominations and traditions I have the privilege to not only hear people's experiences (we might be one Communion, but sometimes the issues we face around the world could not look more different) but also to see

the remarkable ways Anglicans around the world are tackling the issues they face head on, contributing to the common good and the flourishing of their communities and their churches.

It was in Fiji, at a meeting of the primates of the churches of the Anglican Communion in Oceania early last year, where one of them told me, memorably, 'For you Europeans, climate change is a problem for the future. For us it is a problem of every day survival'. All over the Anglican Communion, all over the world, people are faced with the rapid environmental changes, forced to make stark choices about their homes, their communities, their livelihoods and their lives. . The beauty of the Communion is not just in its sheer numbers, it is in its diversity and its different experiences which teach us more about what it is to be a human being on this planet. During the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Hong Kong earlier this year, experiences of the changing climate from across the world informed the strong resolutions passed, and which commit the Member Churches of the Communion to an ever-more courageous response to these issues.

Around the Anglican Communion, people are already engaged in remarkable initiatives to help combat climate change and secure a safe planet, guarded and protected by God's people in God's world. Indeed, it is not just in Anglican and United churches; I see seeds of hope in the many different expressions of Christian faith who are coming together to protect the earth. The Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox Churches and other world communions come together each year with the World Council of Churches, to celebrate a month-long 'Season of Creation' in September and October, praying all over the globe for our environment, and also taking positive action. Here in the Church of South India, as I mentioned, you have participated in interfaith initiatives, working across different religions and backgrounds to address the common issues we shall all face if we do not take action. There may be many different beliefs, many different backgrounds, but we all live on one planet. We need to work together if we are going to change it for the better.

Elsewhere around the world, the Anglican Communion is responding in many different ways. Young Anglicans across Africa have worked with ecumenical friends to study the effects of climate change and develop solutions on a local level. Provinces of the Communion have undertaken huge tree-planting initiatives for the benefit of their communities and the wider world. The Anglican Alliance has led asset-based community development initiatives to put the power back into the hands of local and indigenous communities in discerning appropriate responses to the changing climate. In England many churches have been making the most of their churchyards and turning them into spaces of local biodiversity where natural flora and local creatures can flourish. Staff at the Church of England Pensions Board and the Church Commissioners are leading the way on investor engagement – pushing corporations to decarbonise or risk divestment. Our representatives have worked with UN agencies to support joint responses and advocated for stronger political leadership at UN forums; the Anglican Consultative Council, of which the CSI is a member, has formed our Environmental Network; the Anglican Communion Environmental Network has hosted meetings for Bishops. Things are happening on the local, national and global scale – there are real seeds of hope.

The changes India is facing – environment

As always seems to happen in the midst of large scale problems, it is generally those who are already vulnerable and who are often already under severe pressure who are on the front line of climate change. I was very upset to hear of the horrific levels of farmer suicides in India. These suicides doubtless have many tragic causes, from family issues to illness to debt, but research from the University of California, Berkeley has linked climate change to the suicides of nearly 60,000 Indian farmers and farm workers.

Just a few weeks ago further flooding, mudslides and water-borne diseases affected communities in India, including here in Karnataka. Statistics I saw last week suggested a death toll of over 80 in Karnataka and over 100 in Kerala. What makes this bad situation worse is that many of the people affected are the same people whose homes, lives and livelihoods were shattered by floods last year.

At a UN roundtable event in New York the External Affairs Minister pointed out that ‘nearly 200 million Indians live on less than \$1 a day and nearly 500 million do not have access to modern sources of energy’. The burden should not fall on the poor and vulnerable. It is for those who have the biggest shoulders to bear the weight – we all do what we can, no more and no less. On a larger scale, India is in many ways paying for the excesses of other countries. Its greenhouse gas emissions remain considerably lower than countries like the US and China, and yet India still relies heavily on coal for electricity. For many emerging and developing economies, whose development path cannot mirror that of Western industrialised countries if we are to sustain the integrity of creation, much more needs to be done at all levels to support adaptation, whether in economic, energy or agricultural policies, or in terms of new technologies and financing.

So, what are the other issues involved?

There are a lot of new buzzwords on the scene - Fintech, biotech, infotech. The increasing role of technology in every aspect of our lives is revolutionising the way we live and work. What we invest in is obviously what we think is important – ‘where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’, as the Bible would put it – and so we need to be sure that we are investing in technology ultimately for the wellbeing of all people, not for the profit and gain of a few wealthy elite.

I said earlier that we need to deal with multiple issues concurrently if we are to adequately tackle the issue of climate change. Technology is a key one of these issues. You probably know that a few years ago Pope Francis published a seminal work, his encyclical letter, ‘Laudato Si’, on the environment, an invitation to ‘care for our common home’. Pope Francis addressed technology in this encyclical. He pointed out that technology can’t be used for profit with no regard for its negative consequences on people’s lives. When technology is profit driven, it will inevitably result in disastrous consequences for everyone except perhaps a wealthy few. When technology is developed with the intention to improve people’s lives, however, it has immense possibilities. Technological development for its own sake is not the way to go – it needs to be firmly faced towards taking advantage of its huge opportunities to make life easier for others, for those who are vulnerable and living in poverty.

Climate change is unpredictable – it will have an impact on many other things, from markets (where at best it will affect protection and insurance) to peacekeeping. We have seen in Nigeria that conflict has been driven by increasing competition for decreasing natural resources, leading to devastating consequences.

One other such issue that is intimately related with the environment is trade. As weather conditions worsen it is not only production that might be affected, but also supply lines that may be vulnerable. But trade can have a huge net benefit; it can disperse the cutting-edge technology we were just mentioning, designed to make peoples lives easier, around the globe, it can push us to innovate further and more efficiently. A report from the World Trade pointed out:

‘Proactive and forward-looking trade approaches can be part of a coordinated and effective solution in tackling mounting environmental challenges while fostering economic and social prosperity. International trade is unique in that it promotes specialization, competition, economies of scale and innovation globally. These powerful forces can, if properly harnessed, help make the world economy more sustainable and resilient to environmental risks while having positive effects on prosperity, jobs and equality.’

But, like technology, trade is not necessarily a good in and of itself. It needs to be underpinned by the idea of service, equity and humility, spreading green technology efficiently and supporting less developed supply and value chains, if it is not to generate huge amounts of pollution and drive unsustainable consumption.

The former executive director of the UN Environment Agency pointed to the benefits of international cooperation manifested right here in India, in an Infosys campus in Pocharam, Hyderabad. He said ‘The site is powered by rows of solar panels, built in China, with back-end technology and cabling from Australia, India, the United States and the European Union. It’s paired with a bio-gas plant built from parts far and wide. It’s one of the business, tech and green success stories of India’s economy, and it is producing a generation of Indian engineers who are building new skills in large-scale renewables deployment or in the kind of district cooling solutions that will feature in the green buildings of the future.’

Our trade, innovation and environment goals need to be mutually beneficial, allowing emerging and developing countries to flourish around the world.

So what is the answer?

So, what is the answer? We need, in these times of rapid change, to find the right tension between stability and flexibility. Faith communities have the benefit of the long view, the effective example and the eternal courage to be self-critical, constantly in reform, always active in service without seeking recognition, and always concerned with the common good.

The environment, as I have said, is a matter of justice, a key part of what it is to be a Christian, and reflected in the Anglican Five Marks of Mission. Ultimately, in what William Shakespeare might call ‘this distracted globe’, it is for us to remember that we do not live for our convenience today, we live with an eye to the kingdom of heaven and the eternal life that God has waiting for us. There are no short-term fixes, only sustainable solutions.

Next year will mark five years since the publication of Pope Francis’s ‘Laudato Si’. While the impact that it has had on the consciousness of our world has been profound, there is a significant opportunity to look again at what Pope Francis has said so profoundly and recommit ourselves as people of faith and citizens of the world to care for our common home. The environment and the climate crisis will be a key theme at the Lambeth Conference next summer, where all active bishops from the Anglican Communion and their spouses have been invited to gather for mutual prayer, learning and discussion. Care for our common home is not simply palliative care, but care that sustains and renews our world, so that future generations have a world to call home and in which they themselves can flourish. Many around the world have been inspired by the action of Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish woman who has become a powerful figurehead for the response to the climate emergency. Last week, she completed her journey from Sweden to New York by boat, as she prepares to speak at the UN and challenge political leaders to take courageous action. She is a figurehead for the generation that will be most affected by the choices we make today. I have no doubt that there are many young people in communities all across India who could have a similarly transformative impact on our world. We must support them to ensure they have the opportunity to do so.

A profound cultural shift needs to take place – from material demands to spiritual fulfilment, from exclusion and exploitation of the poor to protection of the vulnerable. We have to face the world as it is and meet people as they are – not necessarily how we’d like them to be. If we want to change this world in our age, we must be willing to engage with the realities of our globe, with all its flaws and messiness.

India has the opportunity to be a pioneer in setting the tone for how we ‘do’ change. As indeed do all of you seated here. To return to Jacques Maritain, he once said that ‘a man of courage flees forward in the midst of new things’. We cannot afford to be timid or nostalgic, but must move forward and embrace the new things that are to come and mould them in the spirit of compassion and justice so that they work to the benefit of all God’s creation and usher in a new dawn of technological advance that is equitable, fair, and deeply rooted in love. Let us become ever more inter-connected with our neighbours and our global family whilst staying true to our roots and our heritage. Let us be true to God’s commission and take seriously the social contract we have, as Edmund Burke said, not just with each other, but with those as yet unborn. If we are motivated by our faith, informed by science and infused with hope and love, we might have the opportunity to craft a new world that looks just a little bit more like the Kingdom of Heaven.

17 min read