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The Archbishop of Canterbury has urged the UK government to keep its promise to the world's poorest people by maintaining its overseas aid commitment

Speaking to CNN's Christiane Amanpour this evening, the Archbishop warned against reducing spending on international development at a time when the pandemic and its effects are hitting the poorest the hardest.

The Archbishop said the commitment to spending 0.7% of gross national income on international development was “one of the great moral and ethical achievements of this country, and cross-party, over the last 10 years”.

“Cutting back from that when 150 million are falling into poverty around the world, and where the economic pandemic is as bad as the Covid pandemic and is killing as many people, just goes straight against the things we believe, and the things that really matter to us.

“And it goes straight against our Christian heritage - the teaching of Jesus Christ that your neighbour is the one whose needs you know, who you can reach out and help. We know these needs. We’re one of the best in the world at meeting them. It’s not a moment to cut.”

The Archbishop said: “They haven’t made a decision yet. So I am asking them to stick to what is in the law - 0.7% of the gross national income going to the development budget. To use our immense expertise, to use our distribution networks that come from our soft networks around the world. To use all of those to get the vaccine distributed around the world, as well as to the most needy in this country.”

He added: “Archbishop Tutu in South Africa said a promise to the poor is especially sacred. We have made these promises. They’ve been made by the government here, by the Commons and the Lords, we must keep our word. We are the kind of country that should do that.”

Last night the Church of England General Synod also formally reiterated its support for maintaining the overseas aid commitment.

In an amendment to a motion about the impact of coronavirus pandemic, Synod voted to “call on Her Majesty’s Government to preserve the United Kingdom’s foreign aid budget at 0.7% of GDP, sending a strong signal that the United Kingdom is a reliable partner for long-term economic, social, environmental and educational advancement across the globe.”

Read the transcript of the interview:

Christiane Amanpour (CA): Joining us now for an exclusive interview, is the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who is head of the world wide Anglican community. Archbishop Welby, welcome to the programme. Good to see you again.

Archbishop of Canterbury (ABC): It’s very nice to see you Christiane, it’s a great privilege to be with you.

CA: So let me ask you because you have come out and publicly chastised the British government, along with Bill Gates and others, for seeking, effectively, to hurt people in the lowest income countries in the world. In other words by slashing foreign aid, the British international aid budget. Tell me why you decided to make a pretty unusual but significant intervention in government policy on this issue.

ABC: Well, I think to be fair they weren’t seeking to hurt people abroad, they are really concerned about the budget deficit. But one of the things we know is that one of the great moral and ethical achievements of this country and cross party over the last ten years has been the

commitment to 0.7 percent of gross national income in giving in international development.

Cutting back from that when 150 million are falling into poverty around the world, where the economic pandemic is as bad as the Covid pandemic and is killing as many people, just goes straight against the things we believe and the things that really matter to us. And it goes straight against our Christian heritage, the teaching of Jesus Christ that your neighbour is the one whose needs you know, who you can reach out and help. We know these needs, we are one of the best in the world at meeting them. It is not a moment to cut.

CA: So we are talking of course, the week when the Chancellor of the Exchequer is going to have his spending review, as you say it's about a budget deficit. And you're talking about the moral imperative at stake here. So look, I'm not trying to throw you into a political debate, but just a few days ago this very same government announced that it was going to increase the defence budget by some £16.5 billion over a period of a few years. At the same time as you've just mentioned, and the World Bank has said, up to 115 million people around the world can be pushed by this pandemic, this year alone, into extreme poverty, that's less than \$1.90 a day. Just talk to us about that.

ABC: [laughter] Forgive me if I don't take you entirely seriously when you say you're not trying to get me into politics here. The two are not connected. Defence budget, I am not an expert on defence budget. They come out, I am sure, of the defence review. They are what they are.

But this is something completely different. The 0.7% is right in and of itself, and it's also right in dealing with Covid, because we won't deal with Covid anywhere unless we deal with it everywhere - and therefore the ability for vaccines to be distributed, for nutrition, for education, for communication, which our international aid effort is so good at. Those are things that are in our own interest as well, and it's also a way of firming up the international order, the rule based order and of confirming us as a reliable long term partner and friend who should be traded with, worked with, who can be trusted. Everything is in our interest and in the interest of the most needy. And for that reason, it's bad for us, it's bad for them... the severe cutbacks will only benefit one living thing, and that's the Covid virus.

CA: So you know, let me ask you, because just this weekend, at the same time as you made your statement, the G20 economies, in a virtual summit, they pledged as I said, to make any vaccine available, free and equitably around the world. I just want to say, or rather put to you, what Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany has said about...she doesn't see the actual mechanisms put in place to ensure that any vaccine is rolled out in an effective way. Let's just air what she said.

[Clip of Angela Merkel]

CA: You know, Angela Merkel has always been very very strong on the need to help developing countries. You know the US has already started mass purchasing for itself, rich countries like the US, Britain has already started making big orders. What do you think of what Merkel said, and have you heard, maybe from your church community around the world in some of the most deprived areas - how it's going for this moment?

ABC: Well we have heard very very recently, a couple of weeks back we had a major meeting with the almost all of the major leaders of our

provinces around the world, obviously remotely. And the most distinctive thing was the economic hardship in so many places, even those that don't have Covid rampant in their countries, are suffering the knock-on economic effects. And it is leading to starvation.

It means the child soldier cannot be rescued. It means the things I have seen being done in refugee camps in Northern Uganda, in schools in South Sudan, in the protection of women from sexual violence in conflict... all of these things are being impacted by the collapse of the global economy.

And Angela Merkel is absolutely right. We need both the money and the delivery systems. As the Anglican Communion, we have in other areas, for instance working with the Gates Foundation, been involved in the distribution of vaccines. The Roman Catholic Church, much bigger than us, much better spread than us, has been doing the same. The networks exist, the money exists, the expertise exists; they just need to be put in the same pot, and we will see a really rapid improvement.

And as I said earlier, and I was quoting the World Health Organisation there, and they dialogued with us, with all the heads of our [Anglican Communion] provinces a couple of weeks back. And we had a really good partnership dialogue. They were the ones who said if we don't solve this virus everywhere, we won't solve it anywhere. So the interest is there to solve and love the poorest.

Archbishop Tutu in South Africa who I am sure you've interviewed, said a promise to the poor is especially sacred... We have made these promises. They've been made by the government here, by the Commons and the Lords, we must keep our word. We are the kind of country that should do that.

CA: So I'm just going to play - it backs you up - what Melinda Gates told me about the perils of if this thing is not rolled out equitably and properly, as you mentioned.

[Clip of Melinda Gates]

CA: So I mean that is pretty stark. Twice as much death. And as you said, you know, it will never be contained if it's not contained everywhere. What are you actually asking the British government to do. What do you want to see them walk back?

ABC: Well, they haven't made a decision yet. So I am asking them to stick to what is in the law. 0.7% of the gross national income going to the development budget. To use our immense expertise, to use our distribution networks that come from our soft networks around the world. To use all of those to get the vaccine distributed around the world as well as to the most needy in this country.

This Oxford vaccine, AstraZeneca, is really good news because it does not need to be kept at minus 60 degrees Celsius. It can be kept in a normal refrigerator. And that means it's much easier to distribute in the global south. We are developing the means, we are doing extraordinary... doing extraordinary work through out pharmacists and scientists. Let's use our skills, which are equally extraordinary, including the Anglicans and the

churches, faith groups, and stop this virus. If we stop the virus, it will also inject a vaccine of hope into the global economy.

CA: Brexit. Many economies say that could deliver a double economic blow. We have seen a rise in homelessness, a rise in poverty here in the UK as well. The recent LSE study - the economic impact of a no deal Brexit could be two or three times the impact of Covid. You've warned many times that the most vulnerable communities will be the hardest hit. What are you feeling at the moment? Do you think there will be deal?

ABC: I have no idea whether there will be a deal. I've no inside information. You'd know better than I would. What I do know is that whether there's a deal or not the vulnerable comms are going to be there. And Brexit politically is decided. We had the ref, we had the election, it's decided. The question is what kind of society do we want to be through that? It's very hard in the present circumstances to forecast economics. Nobody really knows.

There is obviously a significant burden for some people and some places. Those with the broadest shoulders have to carry that burden for those who can't bear the weight. I think one of the things we want to see as a society for the common good, where there's solidarity, care for one another, who wants to have hope for the future for all our communities, especially the most deprived – in the coastal areas and so on, is that there is a clear government policy on homes, education, health differentials, that gives equal opportunity across our entire society. Now those are the essentials. Those are the things – after World War 2, after the industrial revolution, those were the things where we make the difference.

CA: Can I ask you about the Church in general? It was extraordinary to see in the early days of the pandemic this kind of argument about whether the churches should be open, closed, whether they were superspreading locations or not and it was – you know, whether here, in the US or other faiths or around the world. There was criticism when you and other leaders closed down the church, wouldn't have them open for formal services and now you're considering changing that directive. There's still a high Covid rate here, obviously it's coming down in some areas, and the government is considering lifting lockdown in a week or 10 days. Have you been able to think about the role of the Church in these situations, whether they could have been spreading or whether it would have been better to keep them open for mental health, compassion, all kinds of things – the moral leadership that would be required there? What are your thoughts nine months into this?

ABC: Well....it's a really tough question. I think, funnily enough I've just come from our General Synod where we were discussing this, debating this. I think with the knowledge we have now personally I think I was too strict. I'm not convinced I got that one right with the knowledge I have now.

At the time we were working in March on the precautionary principal. What is absolutely clear, and we've been a lot more forthright with the Government about asking for places of worship to remain open, you'll probably have seen the Prime Minister this afternoon has announced they will be open and we really welcome that and we thank him for that. They are amongst the most Covid safe places in this land. They were in the summer and they remain that. I've seen the statistics; negligible infection in churches, absolutely negligible.

The other point is that worship is the very fuel which enables the church to reach out in communities, to run its 35,000 social action projects, its 2500 food banks – that comes from our meeting with Jesus Christ in worship. Take the worship away and its like taking the fuel out of a car and then wondering why it doesn't go. And so I am really pleased we can reopen. We will be ultra-cautious. No one will be forced to reopen. Where people are at risk we will continue to have wonderful online worship which has multiplied the number of people involved significantly, but praise God we will be reopening and I am pleased about that. We can do it well.

And my honest answer – I've tried to be honest and I'll pay for that I suspect - but my honest answer is with the knowledge I have now I think – I'm not blaming anyone else – I think I was over cautious early in the year.

CA: Well I think a lot of people did try to err on the side of caution. But let me ask you another really important issue. And it's not just about caution, it's about accountability. As you well know the official Inquiry, report, into child sexual abuse in the Church came out in October. And it concluded that the Church of England didn't protect children and created a culture, quote, "where abusers could hide" and that, you know, 390 clergy members and church leaders were convicted from forty to 2018 and that quote, "the Church neglected the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of children in favour of protecting its reputation". Obviously your church, obviously the Catholic church, I mean it's been a terrible, terrible 20-odd years for this. What is being done and what do you say to this massive failure of moral standing by the church and the massive failure to protect the most vulnerable?

ABC: Well, I think you understate the level of the shame. It's not just a problem of the last 20 years, it's a problem of the last 80 years and probably long before that. What has been done? I can quote all kinds of statistics, but, basically, we have increased 30-fold our resources for safeguarding. We now have safeguarding officers in every parish. We have safeguarding officers, paid professionals in every diocese. And at the central Church. It's... where people go wrong on this, they're out. We do not cover up. And where you cover up, you're out for covering up. There's a zero tolerance culture. We do our best on that.

We'll make mistakes, I fear, because we're human and there's 800,000 people going to church and all that. But, how should we react? I cannot tell you the shame that I feel, that so many round me feel, of horror. Even for those of us who were ordained recently enough that... you know, it's our institution - we failed.

What are we doing? We're committed to setting up an independent safeguarding system that doesn't rely, as IICSA put it, on "marking our own homework."

We've begun the process of reparations and we're working hard on that. We educate and train people as their top priority - when you're interviewing someone to be a bishop, if they don't pass the safeguarding question, they fail. Doesn't matter how good they are on anything else - it's a pass/fail issue.

So we're doing everything, we know how to do, I'm meeting survivors, victims, listening to them, we've got them involved in everything we're doing.

Is it enough? Not yet. Have we covered it? Not yet enough. But we need to repent, to change to be a place not only that's safe for ourselves but where people know they can go to find safety when they're abused at home, when they're abused elsewhere.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, thank you so much for joining us on this day.

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