

Read the Archbishop of Canterbury's speech to the RISING Global Peace Forum at Coventry Cathedral on Armistice Day

It's a huge pleasure as always to be back in Coventry, and above all, in this extraordinary place. I find 11 o'clock on the 11th of November one of the most important points of the year, and to experience it here is particularly special. It was here that I began to see the shape of work in peace building, which I inherited in the work I did here, which the cathedral has inherited now right back to 1940.

As you are well aware, I am sure, that Coventry was 'coventrated' - to use a word that was coined at the time - in 1940 on the 14th of November during the night, and among many other places destroyed and so many lives destroyed, the cathedral itself burned.

And when you go to the back of the cathedral at the end of this, do look afresh and reflect on the words set into the floor that on 14th November 1940 this cathedral 'burnt to the glory of God' and was rebuilt 25th May 1962.

After it had fallen, amidst the destruction and the smoke and the horror of Coventry at the time, Provost Richard Howard and sometime later as we can see having the words 'Father Forgive' inscribed on the wall behind the Altar. And creating a worldwide association, family of reconciliation called 'The Community of the Cross of Nails' - the cross of nails which is my pectoral cross which is worn by the dean and canons here being a symbol of this cathedral.

And on Christmas Day 1940, Provost Howard preached at the 10 o'clock BBC service and said that after the war they would rebuild 'a more Christ-Child-like world'. In the midst of the most extreme circumstances, we are all still called by God to a choice. The choice of hatred - of planting seeds of hatred that will bear the fruit of war and destruction that will continue for generations - or of planting the seeds of forgiveness. Hatred flowers quickly and bears fruit rapidly and spreads easily. Peace, forgiveness, kindness - to echo the closing words of the litany - peace, kindness, forgiveness are words that seem to be increasingly drowned out in our world.

More and more I hear people saying, if only there was more kindness. Peace is a slow growing plant. Its fruit fragile and easily bitten by the frost of hatred. But Dick Howard saw what needed to be done and he set a path that has continued to this day. He heard the call that God gives us to move toward transformation and reconciliation.

And out of that enmity arose these communities, this family, these groups around the world, committed to loving their neighbour who, when Jesus was asked with the question, who is my neighbour, he spoke of neighbour in the form of the closest enemy that there was to the Jewish people at the time. And so in one sense when he says love your neighbour and love your enemy he is saying the same thing twice in so many parts of the world.

One of the ways in which we see the glory of God is the transformation of despairing individuals to be communities of hope, for we serve the God who transforms dead ends into turning points.

Richard Howard's words show that even at that time of extreme grief and hatred of our enemies, it is possible at the most local level, amidst destruction, to call for peace and reconciliation. It's not popular. Looking around I can see people here who have experienced the lack of popularity. But that leadership can bear fruit internationally and nationally for decades to come. A slow growing fruit, as I said.

When I was working here between 2002 and 2007, one of the guides, an elderly man, talked about his experience of that night of the 14th November. We were chatting down the back there. And he said, you know, a couple of days ago I saw three people standing outside the west screen, and they kept coming towards the door and moving away, two women and a man. And eventually we asked them in - they looked hesitant about coming in - they came in and they wandered around and the man came up to me and said, I need to tell you something. 'I have been to Coventry once before, but I was in an airplane. I am German and I was above the city.' And the man who had gone through the bombing said his first reaction - his instinctive reaction - was to clench his fist. And he thought to himself, I have spent 20 years telling this story, I am not going to give up now. And he said, 'I forgive'. He said, I wasn't even sure if I meant it, but I knew I meant it once I had said it.

The local is the incarnation, the point at which the reality, if seen by almost no one else, is still seen by God. The local is where reconciliation and peace building is essential. And so as I go on to the next section after that introduction of what I want to say, I am going to talk a little bit about the global, but I will come back to the local, because without the local there is nothing we can do about the global.

We are facing a time when in human terms the next thirty years – geopolitically, economically, climate change with scientific and technological revolution on a scale that we haven't even seen over the last century – is going to put more pressure on how we live with one another all around the world than anything we have experienced in our lifetimes or even, apart from possibly the second world war, before that.

John, as Dean of Coventry, as I stand here I believe that this cathedral has yet to find its greatest point of need, its greatest vocation. And the foundations for what it will be called to stand for and do around the world need to be so deep and solid that even what is coming, those great storms that are coming will not cause it to fall, fail or fear.

An often-used figure, estimated by Professor Norman Myers of Oxford University and cited by the IPCC and Stern Review is that there will be 200 million climate migrants by 2050. A few weeks ago I was in Rome at a preparatory meeting of faith leaders at the Vatican for COP26 and the Head of the IPCC speaking to us online from Taiwan said that that updated figure was now probably nearer 800 million at our present rate of progress. To put that in context we have 82 million roughly forcibly displaced in the world today.^[1]

To put it in context, 82 million today, at the end of the greatest war in human history in 1945 it was roughly 20-25 million^[2]. 800 million - even 200 million - is unimaginable in what that will do to people. Because what happens to people - and we are only talking about climate there, not the secondary effects – what happens to people when they run out of food or water is they move. And when there is people movement there is conflict.

A colleague at Lambeth wrote a very powerful paper recently which has had a great impact on my thinking about the links between climate change and conflict. And he showed in that paper very clearly indeed that climate change is certainly a direct cause of some conflict, but it is one of the greatest foundations of conflict. It is a solid basis on which conflict can flourish, and hatred and fear. It intensifies human movement. It intensifies weather events - flooding, droughts, heatwaves, storms – and typically in our world it is the most vulnerable who are most impacted.

It is a significant force multiplier. Human security risks spill over into other higher order national and international security threats. Even if it is 'just' 200 million who are directly affected and forced to move by climate change, where they move to will be occupied and there will be struggles. So at a geo-political level, whatever else one says about what is happening in this world it is clear that there will be political instability, intra-state and inter-state tensions, threats to critical infrastructure, and significant unpredictability in food and water supplies. We already see some of the impact of this on the Nile – a source of life for several hundred million people.

And as nations naturally rise and fall over the coming century, as they compete on the geopolitical stage, the question is not will there be competition - there always is between human beings - the question is whether we have put in place, the infrastructures of reconciliation, the architecture of reconciliation, of peace building, that enables competition to happen robustly, fiercely, but not violently. That enables people movement to happen, not without fears and difficulties because that will always be the case when people encounter those who are other, but in a context that enables it to be managed in which those driven out by our historic failures in the climate and the natural world and biodiversity are able to be generous and hospitable. To look for a world beyond the moments of climate change, to look for a world in which there is a genuine alternative to destructive conflict.

And then when we turn to the technical and the biological, the scientific, we are already seeing some of the very beginnings of the impact of that - the recent war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, transformed by Azerbaijan receiving assistance with forms of technology that the Armenian government did not have. In the late 19th century where Winston Church charged with the lancers at Omdurman, the British defeated a far greater army because the far greater army was equipped with the weapons of the 1830s and 40s and the British had Gatling guns. When we have robotics on the battlefield – and believe me that is where they will come because that is where so many governments put their effort – when we have robotics on the battlefield it will make the differences in technology at Omdurman look negligible.

And will that drive us not only towards wars of conquest, ambition, power seeking as we reflected in the litany? Pride? Desire to possess what is not our own? Or will it move us towards seeking to tackle the inequalities globally and locally? And what is the structure, the infrastructure that enables us to do that? And what I am arguing, at the heart of this is that reconciliation is not unanimity, it is not full agreement!

God has made us, so the first point is incarnation, the first theological point. The second one is creation. The creation that we are in the course of damaging. The creation which within human society is so beautifully, luxuriously, exuberantly, insanely, absurdly diverse. Which flourishes in its diversity. Where biodiversity, where ecological systems and complex ecological systems give rise to more and more beauty. Except in human society, where our fallenness, our sinfulness, has turned the possibilities of that beauty, to give us the equally and often more attractively real possibilities of mutual destruction.

And so reconciliation is non unanimity, it is finding a way of flourishing with diversity. Of struggling with it. Of robust argument, of conflict that is not destructive. Out of which comes advancement. It is a radical vision. And it begins at the local, but it also needs leadership.

I am conscious there is a doctoral student here from the university who comes from Rwanda. Well Burundi I know better than Rwanda, and many years ago when I was working here I was in Burundi, in Bujumbura, just after the end of the civil war. It was still very, very tense with lots of fighting going on up in the hills. And I was invited to facilitate a three-day conference of rebel and government military and political leaders on reconciliation.

On the third day – by which time people were stopping being polite and started to say what they really meant (it's always much quicker in a parochial church council) a man in one part of the room pointed across the room to another. He said 'In the war he led a militia that killed 30,000 people. How can I forgive him? How can I be reconciled?'

And I looked out of the window across Lake Tetanize, while trying to think of what to say. I pointed out to the lake, and I said to him 'If you go out in a boat on the lake and you fall out of the boat what do you do?' He replied: 'I swim'.

I said 'If you don't swim what happens?' And he said 'Well, I drown'. I said 'Well, if you don't reconcile you will slaughter each other'.

Reconciliation is done by the people in conflict – not by outsiders. It is done by the people hurt by conflict and people deeply scarred by conflict. It doesn't happen in sterile environments, orchestrated by people in suits and clipboards. And those who do come to seek to support it, must do so from the back, invisibly. Again, we come back to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. A figure that most would not have heard of. A figure that you could have walked past in the street and not looked twice at. A baby born, where if you were outside of the sound of the baby you wouldn't be aware that God had just landed on this world. And the incarnation was that he was part of conflict and scarring and struggle and pain. And so the reconciler must be someone who shares in pain.

Over the summer I had a sabbatical. I notice that a newspaper recently said that it was a year's sabbatical. Many people who work with me might have wished it was! But sadly it was three months, which seemed quite a long time at the time. And I wrote an exceptionally boring book about reconciliation. It's the only way I can work out what I think, is to either say it or write it down, and on the whole my colleagues prefer that I write it down because then they can put it in a locked drawer where it can't do any serious harm! It has been a book that has been brewing since I was here and it has at its core that when you deal with conflict you are dealing with complex people, complex situations, flawed people, sometimes well meaning, sometimes profoundly evil. Sometimes powerful, sometimes vulnerable. And in all that, I've found that reconciliation happens at three levels.

First, as I've spoken about, the local leaders can guide their communities. It is absolutely indispensable. Top down, middle out, bottom up. Dick Howard – a great historic local leader who planted the fruit of reconciliation that is bearing fruit today. They face the challenges most realistically because they are in the front line of the conflict. They are called to resist the mob mentalities of division and revenge; to stand up against the politicians who manipulate and use hatreds. But they alter the discourse of the time, and impact future global thinking.

What can we do at the local, because it often feels so helpless and hopeless? My great lesson on that came from a friend called Bishop Désiré Mukaniwa. I first met him when I was working here and I went to see him in Goma in the Congo. It was under siege at the time and he took me to a refugee camp within the area where he worked. There were about 250,000 refugees in the region at the time. It showed the consequences of conflict. And as I walked with him, I was overwhelmed, and said “How do you find resilience with this? How do you deal with it?” and he said, “We do what God gives us the resources to do, and the rest we leave”. The local can only do what it can do, and it’s not helped by overreach or guilt or a sense of failure that they’ve not solved the world’s problems.

He used to go up into the fighting areas and hold football competitions bringing together teams of young men, child soldiers, adolescent soldiers, who were working with the militias from opposite sides. They played football in the morning, then they were given lunch and taught about Christian faith. And then in the afternoon he gave them a course on peacebuilding. The girls were trained and taught by Claudaline, his wife. Bisho Désiré, after a mission up north of Goma 18 months ago, into the midst of the militias amongst the Ebola, measles, cholera, the typhoid, and the malaria, came back to Goma and began coughing. He had picked up COVID and he died a few days later. I miss him each day.

But the impact he had, and she continues to have on countless lives, shows what can be achieved locally.

And then there’s the national level, those who guide countries. At COP26 on the first day, I met President Kenyatta. From a place of deep instability and confusion after the last set of elections, he’s brought Kenya to a place where the next set show a good chance of a peaceful transition of power with him stepping down and moving onto other things internationally. Leaders make a difference. We must appeal to our leaders, instruct our leaders, demonstrate to our leaders, that the greatest gift they can give in the future is peace, not power.

When you look at The Integrated Review (The Integrated Review 2021 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk))

published in March by the British government, it has I think 13 mentions of peace in 114 pages – two of them connected with the use of nuclear weapons which is probably slightly ironic. There is no single section of it that seeks to demonstrate a strategy for peace development and peacebuilding. There is much that develops a strategy for more fighting, including weapons of mass destruction. How different that seems to people like Mandela and Gandhi, who fought for freedom but in a way that bought peace.

Global leadership matters of course - in this world we can’t be naïve; there will always be armies and fighting. But what is the aim? What is the basis of that? Is it to develop the structures, the architectures as I’ve said earlier that enables conflict to be transformed? Is it a belief in Dick Howard’s belief in the God that brings turning points and hope?

The Community of the Cross of Nails provides the seeds of such a global infrastructure, together with many other reconciliation organisations around the world. Conflict and leadership exist at every level – from the family, to the local, the regional, national, international and the global. We have space and cyber as new frontiers of warfare, as our own world fails to contain its unquenchable desire for conflict – that’s what the litany of reconciliation is about.

Conflict in one sense is like a horseshoe: at one end we have the relationships with ourselves; at its broadest we find the geopolitical conflicts. And at its broadest they are the most suicidal. For failure to deal with climate change, failure to have a structure of peacebuilding which leads us to the use of weapons of mass destruction, those failures are a success in building that old absurdity of a circular firing squad, in which their mere use destroys ourselves as well as our enemies.

In 2019, I joined Pope Francis at the Vatican with a meeting of South Sudanese leaders to embrace peace. It was a time of reflection, listening and considerable challenge for the leaders. It ended with the challenge of the Pope falling at their feet and kissing their feet, imploring them to seek peace. There you saw the individual and there you saw the national in a zone of the world which is torn by fighting in every country in that region. But those leaders can make a difference. Leadership matters.

And there's also the middle ground. It's not just the local and the global or the national; it's also the practice of reconciliation in the middle – the corporate leaders, the leaders of intermediate organisations, as William Temple called them. In this country the capacity of groups like the NHS, of education, of universities, to be places that create structures of peacebuilding within their differences – especially the difference we face today with questions of safety and safety of students, and radical personal autonomy. That capacity to build gives you the 3rd level, the intermediate, which joins the local and the global.

All these levels of conflict are porous and interchangeable. Climate change is global but in places like Mali, farmer–herder conflicts tend to revolve around limited access to livestock corridors. The same in Nigeria where desertification and rainfall variance has smashed together the herders and the farmers: Cain and Abel. Climate change is playing out at a national level, but the answer to that conflict and the avoidance of the driving of hundreds of millions of people into moving, and therefore moving into the likelihood of further conflict, is something that has to be managed well. In Mozambique, 60% of the population has no access to energy. Simply to cut off the production of hydrocarbons, of oil and gas, may be good for the climate but there has to be a transition. And it is a transition that depends on the active cooperation of

- the local, particularly faith groups - our 4 dioceses in Mozambique are working closely with the UN and the much bigger Roman Catholic Church there;

- the ultimately local, in the parish;

- the involvement of companies like TOTAL that is managing the extraction of gas resources there, and their commitment;

- the national with the President of Mozambique and regional leaders.

...Those have to come together. And they will be put together by peacebuilders, like here.

Let me give you finally a couple of examples. At the very local, the Reconciliation team at Lambeth Palace has pioneered the development of something called the Difference course. It is a 5 session course, lasting about an hour and a half each session, which looks at different aspects of reconciliation and talks about 3 'habits' of reconciliation:

1) be curious - developing a truly empathetic world-view perspective of our customers, our competitors, our challengers, our adversaries.

2) the need to be present - the ability to encounter and listen to those who might mean us harm.

3) and the ability to reimagine - making change possible together, and with that to deliver sustainable peace.

Today, Armistice Day, we remember those who gave their futures for our present. As part of this 'reimagining' we need at the next level for reconciliation to be an in-built part of our diplomacy, security and economic thinking. It needs to be, at every level, built-in. General Rupert Smith who commanded the British division in the first Gulf War, wrote an incredibly powerful book called 'The Utility of Force', and he talked about the utility of force being essentially to create space for other tools to be used. The successful General, we remember, is the one who wins the war without anyone being killed. Our Own Ministry of Defence has as its motto being a 'Force for Good'. Are we able to project not just force but peace? When they build the aircraft carriers, they talk about the projection of force; what about the projection of peace?

The government in the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office has a unit called the Mediation and Reconciliation Hub. It didn't get a mention in the strategy sadly, but that is an example that should be used and carried more broadly. It is a wonderful initiative, carried out over the last 3 or 4 years. It needs to be promoted more broadly and given more strength, so that right across our government and other governments, they have people who argue for peace.

In Christian thinking, with Aquinas and Augustine and many others, there is a sophisticated development of Just War theory. There is no such equivalent in a 'Just Peace' theory – not with the same structures and insight. Why's that? It doesn't really need justifying. We all accept that peace with integrity and justice is good. And the result is we think hard about how to fight, but not often how to build alternatives to fighting.

So to conclude, the 19th century historian, F.W. Maitland observed 'we should always be aware that what now lies in the past once lay in the future'.

In this context, that, I would argue, means that we should strive to carry on advocating for those precious moments of reconciliation as 'the human ambition', because what happened before here and after the Second World War, can happen in the future.

Look at the extraordinary nature of that turning point. When I was working – forgive me for I have sinned, I worked in the oil industry – when I was working in the oil industry, I was on a trip to Nigeria and I was with the head of our shipping department who was near retirement at the time (this was round about 1980, 40 years ago, a bit more) and we were talking funnily enough about the European Union – as it was then called the EEC, European Economic Community - and he said to me after a couple of hours of talking on the flight, he said, ‘you need to understand’ – he was a very senior Frenchman, a distinguished aristocratic background – he said, ‘you need to understand this is not about economics, this is about reconciliation and peace, and it’s peace between Germany and France’. He said, ‘my grandfather fought in 1870, and his brother was killed. My father was gassed, my uncle was killed, between 14 and 18.’ ‘I fought in the resistance’ he said, ‘and my brother was killed’. The point is, we need to build structures that mean young Frenchmen and young Germans never kill each other again. And it happened. We can look at the outlook for the world and feel like I felt with +Désiré – ‘it’s too big, we can’t do anything’. But we can do what God gives us the resources to do, for that is our call and vocation.

We see false dawns, we see dead ends, we see turning points. The responsibility of leading in reconciliation is to bring God into the midst of it, so that at all these points there is a turning point. Through the power of God, turning points can be created out of dead ends. In a brutal and cruel world, we cry out as we hear people cry around the world today, ‘Have mercy, give us peace’ and Christ crucified and risen responds, ‘Have hope, here is peace’. God’s peace is offered to the whole world, for Jesus said ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’, not blessed are the rich peacemakers or the white peacemakers, or the nice peacemakers; just ‘the peacemakers’, for they will be called the children of God. Dick Howard got that. To the glory of God, this Cathedral burnt.

Now is the time for building the foundations for the next stage of our human journey; for restoring what we’ve neglected, for making whole what we’ve allowed to be broken. It is difficult, costly and painful, it needs every level, but it is transformative and it gives hope. And those who build peace, like Dick Howard, shine that light of hope into the future, however dark that future may seem.

Thank you.

[1] <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>

[2] <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/world/refugees-record-un.html>

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