

Read the Archbishop of Canterbury's keynote lecture, given at Lambeth Palace this evening, on the Church's call to reconciliation:

Our world is changing at the moment and likely to change over the next 30 or 40 years more rapidly than any equivalent period in human history. That change will be driven to a large extent by climate change.

In 1945 there were roughly 25 million refugees after the greatest war in human history. Today, with the war in Ukraine, there's little over 90 million. The best estimate from the International Panel on Climate Change Chair, in a speech to religious leaders in Rome in November, October, just before COP 26, was that even at 2 degrees we will be at 800 million, 10 times virtually what we've got today. And at ending much over that, we'll be up to about 1.2 billion people driven to move by climate stress. The inability to grow crops. The inability to live in some areas. James Megoran has done some remarkable analysis looking at the impact of that, and long before we get 2050, the impact of the beginnings of those movements will be much more likelihood of conflict in far more areas of the world.

Science and technology are changing more rapidly than we have ever known. And they offer two ways forward. One is an extraordinary era of progress for all human beings in which with a strong moral underpinning, the knowledge that God enables us to discover in science and technology with artificial intelligence, machine learning, and changes in the physical and biological sciences will open the way to radical changes in life and enable us to cope with things like climate change.

We'll see economic growth spreading right around the world without destroying its environment. We'll see hope for people whose only hope at the moment is they might just have enough food tomorrow. But if we look at what happened to the vaccine, if we look at the nature of human beings, the probability is that we will have a dystopian future of areas, small minorities of the world, of security in health, security and long life, security in stability and an absolute fear of everything over outside their borders. A fear that will lead them to strike out, start wars and destroy. Economic injustice will flourish. Concentration of power will grow. Religious fundamentalism will deepen. Hatred of minorities will increase.

How will we make that choice? It is not by believing that somehow, we can all come together. It is not by believing that somehow in a Micawberish sense everything will turn out Okay. It is by the way in which we learn to deal with our differences in a world where thanks to information technology, the differences that were once hidden behind six months of voyage in a sailing ship are now available to us in a few seconds on something we have in our pocket where someone can go into an Internet Cafe in Darfur and browse their way through Harrods.

And that is why for me, this issue of reconciliation is the greatest possible hope particularly if God's people, the church around the world learns and shows the example of how we cope with diversity, how we cope with the most enormous differences. In about 5 to 6 weeks, we have the Lambeth Conference, roughly 700 bishops coming from all over the world. We will have people whose dioceses are in the hills of Papua New Guinea and people whose diocese encompasses the canyons of Wall Street. Both of those will be with us. Their understanding of life, of value, of human identity, of money, of justice, of economy will be formed completely differently.

In 2014 I met a man in Papua New Guinea, in Port Moresby, whose grandfather up in the hills, who was still alive at the time, was the first man in his people group ever to see a wheel. His grandson had a degree in civil engineering from Heriot-Watt in Edinburgh. They were both practising Anglicans, and that's within one country. These differences are not liveable without a purposeful and deliberate approach to how we live together on this planet, against which we have declared war unconsciously, unwittingly, in many cases, unwillingly but a hot war in every sense of the word.Â

The call to reconciliation is a call through Christ to every human being. It is the journey towards God's new creation. And when we start a journey, there are a number of essentials quite apart from remembering to pack a toothbrush and a passport. The first is to know where you're going. Travelling without knowing the destination is okay while the sun is shining and you're well stocked with supplies, but when the terrain gets trickier and your rucksack is empty, knowing where you are heading is what can keep you going.

For some, not knowing the destination of the journey is stimulating. I've had the misfortune as some of you may have to travel with people like that. It sends me crackers. But unless you really are in a gap year or writing a travel novel, I advise from against that approach to travel.

The second thing is to know how to travel in order to arrive in one piece. The trips we remember well on the whole, or at least I do, are those during which arriving in one piece was in doubt. I mentioned Kenya and being there in 1974 during the school holidays I travelled a lot, mainly hitchhiking. I can remember the three days going through Tanzania sitting next to a Maasai leader with his son on a bus, which broke down three times in those three days, once on an escarpment where the driver stopped it by running it into a Cliff. I can remember the journey with a mad Italian driver down the side of the Rift Valley going faster and faster on narrow, winding roads on the edge of cliffs. I have no memory of the safe drives.

Yet as I get older, what I like is a stimulating journey to a place that has attractions with a means of travel that even if not comfortable, has a reasonable chance of getting me there. And this is not entirely a digression. Reconciliation is not an event; it is a journey of process. At best it takes years, very often it takes generations. Too often people think that if they jump onto the nearest form of transport, however inappropriate it may be like the silent film era slapstick Keystone Cops, which some of you may have seen, who tried chasing a car on a child's pedal trike. Even if they get somewhere, they don't know when they've arrived, and their lives continue without a sense of having moved. To put it bluntly, nothing much changes.

Yet the process of reconciliation is a journey that transforms us from the inside out. It is essentially a process of conversion. Conversion of heart, of mind, of spirit, of soul. Conversion of life. In terms that Saint Benedict used in his rule, it is conversion of life and that requires a changed and renewed attitude daily. The Bible is full of passages which refer to reconciliation. Reverend Doctor Sam Wells, who actually is sitting here this evening, slightly to my horror because he's so much better at this than I'm, started a memorable and wonderful talk at Coventry Cathedral in 2013 with the words, "Reconciliation is the gospel." And today I'm going to focus as Scriptural background on a few verses from Colossian's 1, beginning of verse 15.

The son is the image of the invisible God, the first-born the over-all creation for in him all things were created, things in heaven and on Earth, visible and Invisible whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him, all things hold together. Are you getting the point there? All things.

Â And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the first born from among the dead. So, that in everything he might have the supremacy.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Within this passage, there are a number of unities of expressions of unity. Three, in particular, I want to pick up. And those three unities are all based around Christ. And in being based around Christ, call us to unity and reconciliation through Christ with creation within the church and as individuals with one another. It's not by any means the limit of reconciliation, but it's a beginning.Â

In their description of who Christ is, they called us to see afresh the beauty and wonder of the unity in diversity of the Trinity and thus to touch on the very limits and faintest glimmer of the beauty of love in God, that to which we are called by participating in the gift of reconciliation of our relationship with creation.

Within Islam, there is a very strong sense that because God is one, oneness lived out is of the essence of what is good and being in God. And so the unity of God, the unity of creation are held together theologically. Too often as Christians with our long history of divisions, increasing divisions and the extreme autonomy of the lives of many in the global north.

We forget unity, but it is obviously clear within Christian theology more than half a Millennium before the prophet, God who is perfectly one and whose life as Trinity is perfect harmony. He has made a universe designed to be perfectly harmonious. The very nature of God shown in God's creation is of diversity and unity held together. The richness of creation in its variety is yet or one interdependent and whole.

At the moment there is going on the Conference on Biodiversity, which comes up ahead of COP 27. The reason that biodiversity matters so much is that everything is held together that when you destroy one bit of an ecosystem, the knock-on effect is completely unpredictable. I was talking to the head gardener who looks after the garden here, which is enormous and beautiful. We were talking about the fact that he got rid of all chemicals in this garden four or five years ago and that as a result there are loads of aphids, but he says the point about the aphids is they're eaten by something which is eaten by something which is eaten by something, the whole system holds together. Now, if you're in aphid, it might not be very good news, but if you're further up the food chain, it probably is good news.

The richness of creation, the harmony before the fall is changed when conflict and disruption come into the nature of God's creation. The return of Christ will bring a new heaven and new earth. All things put back in order, reintegrated and reconcile. The harmony of creation is the fundamental basis for our call for reconciliation with the creation of which we are a dependent part. That is why climate change matters. The change bit is fine. Climate has always changed. The problem is that the change is the result of our abuse of the climate.

In other words, we who are put there in God's image to tend, guard and serve end up abusing in our own interest. The image of the unity of creation calls us to many different forms of thinking. It should be something that changes what we are. It speaks to us of the beauty of God in the way that biodiversity is not just a luxurious over outpouring of God's creativity, but an essential picture of the unfathomable complexity of understanding who God is. What everything does with everything else can never finally be discovered or understood. Whether it is in the development of chaos theory which seeks the purpose in what is apparently random, or the recognition that the loss of the top predator in an ecosystem results in the whole machinery failing to balance and adapt.

We are called to awe and worship at the extent of the creation and its interdependence. Yet the unity of creation goes much further. It tells us that harmony and unity and diversity are the results of completed reconciliation. The outcome of reconciliation is not monotony, but the richest of diversity. The dream of reconciliation is to arrive in any conflict at a point where tensions balance out, gifts are liberated, and each is able to live in light and security. When we look for our vision of the destination, that is an essential building block part of the journey.

Too often, reconciliation is seen as unanimity that we all agree. What absolute nonsense. Most of us, certainly me, don't agree with ourselves quite a lot of the time or we're indecisive, but I'm not sure about that. Put two people together and there will always be diversity. Put a church together and you'll have a General Synod. And whatever else the General Synod is, it is very seldom unanimity.

There are many questions raised by such an analysis, obviously among the most prominent is that nature is red in tooth and claw, with species exterminated by the natural events of the creations, such as the asteroid event that led to the end of the dinosaurs. Nature is not a harmonious, nor is the creation kind. Beginning with vast explosion and ending in the collapse of all things into one infinitely dense object is not harmony but beyond the imaginable limits of destruction. Verses 19-20 by implication take this into account.

An unreconciled creation or an unreconciled relationship from the personal through to the global, and we began with global, and even the cosmic is an inherently unstable thing that ends in collapse. It is not just according to Paul in this passage that all people may be reconciled to God, but He goes so infinitely further. He says through making peace on the cross, all things will be reconciled to their creator.

This is far, far beyond our wildest dreams. In reconciliation, we are rightly, deeply concerned with human beings compassionate and compelled by the suffering of conflict. Yet this passage requires a broader vision of God's movement towards a reconciled Cosmos, and that being part of our journey. Second, the unity of the church, verses 18-20, the second part of God's creation, or a second part of God's creation in this passage, is the creation of the Church of which Christ is the head, the beginning, the first born from the dead so that he might come to have first place in everything.

The church must find its way to visible unity, maintaining profound diversity because Christ is the head. We often confuse this in practice, although holding to it in theory. It is only in our diverse togetherness that we can come to understand the nature or begin to understand the further reaches of the nature and image of God. It is in every tribe and tongue that we glimpse the image of God in which we are all made. This is the deep offence of racism on Windrush Day.

This is something we discover through our collective creative and congregational existence. It's a challenge to our historic and often current failure in which we create God in our own image. As Voltaire said "in the beginning, God created man in his own image, and man has been trying to repay the favour ever since". We must not try and put our human limits on the divine and limitless God. Within Anglican leadership, the Archbishop of Canterbury is never referred to as a person interestingly, in the instruments of communion, I am in fact an instrument of communion and a focus of unity. It would be nice if they put human beings somewhere in there. I'm often referred to as the first among equals but in fact the archbishop, he or she in the future, is merely one of the many who belonged to Christ.

The church is meant to be a sign of the coming Kingdom. She is called into the presence of God, the Holy Trinity, where we worship. She is sent into the world hostile, far off and all lost where we witnessed convincing the above all because we are one [John 17 Verse 21]. Love for one another was so convincing in Antioch, it's recorded in Acts 11:19, that people were forced to find a new name for these people who crossed every social and ethnic boundary and loved one another. That name was Christians. Christians who love one another reveal Christ because they reflect the nature of God in their diversity in unity. Except, like the creation, Christians too are frankly red in tooth and claw.

Not only are we divided by history, arguing over things that those outside the church neither understand nor care about, but we take those arguments to extremes. We anathematize. We strike from the diptychs. I had to look that one up when I was first told that I'd been struck from a diptych.. We're excluded, we demean one another. I remember when I was installed in my parish as the vicar, the local area Dean made it perfectly clear that the Congregational Church minister would not be welcome to walk in procession because he wasn't a priest. Well, you could argue about that, but when I looked, he led a church and was a human being and that qualified to walk in the procession. He did walk in the procession.

Â In our treatment of one another, we bully and assemble without repentance or apology. We lie for the sake of gaining small amounts of power in institutions that do not matter. In the treatment of the vulnerable, the excluded and the marginal we abuse, ignore and sometimes get close at least spiritually and psychologically to crucifying. Had today's church been in the crowd around the woman caught in adultery in John 8, I wonder sometimes if Jesus would have dared to challenge the one without sin to throw the first stone, because we are so confident of our own righteousness that she would not only have been stoned but buried under a heap of stones, mostly transmitted by social media. A heap, the height of the pyramid.

In answer to which we are not discarded by God. Although we are judged by being allowed to reap the fruits of our disunity. On one side we see the beauty of the Trinity in which God or the son and agent of the creation of the church through the gift of the Holy Spirit sent by the father are not reconciled because there has never been anything to reconcile. United as one in perfect love, they call us into a fellowship which brings reconciliation among us by our common embrace of God, by the Spirit through the work of Jesus. That is the vision of our destination on this journey.

Â The motive power to travel is the love of God by the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts, Romans 5:5. The expression of that love is found in the habits of reconciliation which, and here we get onto a bit of the advisement break, is well expressed in the difference course. It is fine to see what the destination is, but if it is only a vision on a far distant hill across a vast expanse of uncrossable terrain, it is of little value. Reconciliation amongst Christians with all their diversity liberates the church to reflect the image of God. And for this reason, the Difference Course goes to the heart of what it is to be the church. It seeks to enable Christians to experience the conversion of life to a new way of living and being extremely different.

And that brings us to the third unity, our individual and collective unity with Christ through his death on the cross. It is this unity that makes us one because we're all one in Christ, Colossians 3:11 sets out that there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all and in all. The new Society of the Church is a holy nation. It is God's own people, One Peter 2:9, with a vocation of worship and witness.

The capacity to become the transformative nation we are called to be is the result of daily conversion to reconciliation and peace. We are called to be different to become what we're called. God has made a nation by the father sending the son and then equipping the redeemed people with the Holy Spirit. The unity of the church is found in Christ, not in choice. If we belong to Christ, we are one, not many churches.

Yet the transfer from theory into the hubbub of a divided and individualistic world leads to the church being converted by the world, not vice versa. The ways in which globe works is not only unity in Christ, who reveals the father, but also the sending out of the people of God into the world in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit takes Philip to the Ethiopian in the desert and sends Paul and Barnabas on the 1st missionary journey. The church must look outward because that is the authentic sign of the spirit of God to proclaim, to worship and witness.

Over the weekend, I was doing an Evangelistic missionary trip in Truro Diocese, which basically covers Cornwall. And it was the most moving thing, because what I found in many places, including a remarkable extraordinary parish in Bodmin is a state where everything was held together by the presence of extraordinary people in the church who loved and cared and believed in the cure of souls, which is the Anglican tradition, the Church of England tradition, rather, which says that every person in your parish is your business. Whatever they believe or don't believe. In these, the church must look outwards.

The scripture in Colossians calls us to be a missionary and evangelistic because the gospel quotes 'Has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven'. Like Paul, we are a service of that gospel. In these few, extraordinary verses, the whole call of the Christian is presented. It is a call to unity to transformation and to finding peace with God. In a world facing an indescribable food crisis for the poor this year at this moment, how can the church practise declare and enable the spirituality of reconciliation? In a world of technology and social media, how can we keep people not just of communication but of community?

Reconciliation unleashes energy in the church, not just human, but the flow of the Spirit who breaks down barriers and softens the hearts of those with all they need to share what they have with those most in need. A reconciled church cries out against injustice and seeks the universality of the kingdom of God. We go back to Paul's reminder of the need for one another, "Held in love", 1 Corinthians 12-14 because we as human and sinful where we disagree, we must learn to disagree well. It means reshaping to look outwards and respond to the crises that surround us. It calls us away from looking inward to creating a zero-sum church in which any group's gain is another loss. It calls us to ask what does God show us of need in the world before we ask about ourselves.

That does not mean chaos. The International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission, for obvious reasons known as IARCCUM because it's shorter, is the development of the Anglican Roman Catholic Ecumenical dialogue, which seeks to partner bishops across the world in working together in mission. It's an institutional structure with an outward-looking aspect. We can be organised and still be Christian, and that's not being managerial.

The Difference Course has its basic habits to be curious, to be present and to reimagine. It gives us an impetus to put ourselves outside our own context, then to stand with others and to listen to what the Spirit of God is saying about our core. Of the three habits, it teaches, being curious is a challenge to look at others through God's eyes rather than what our own. Try telling the history of the last 30 years of Christian relationships with Islam through the eyes of a Muslim living in Iraq. You get a different perspective.

It's also a challenge to look to history, culture, power dynamics, memory and all the many other circumstances that form the context for conflict. We have an aversion to complexity, but reconciliation means we must embrace complexity. Simplicity is the enemy of reconciliation. It's a shortcut that leads to disaster.

Being present is often costly because it requires us to bring ourselves and what we have to, situation. Rather than disengage, deflect, hide or avoid in the face of conflict and unhealthy power imbalances, it will mean deep lament, being present to a broken reality. I will never forget the three days I spent in Canada earlier this year present to indigenous people, First Nations leaders, Christian leaders who for 80 or 90 years, their children had been taken by the mountains at the age of 3 upwards, or 5 and put in residential schools run by churches, including the Anglicans where they were abused and ill-treated, given the strap for such terrible crimes as holding a siblings' hand as a 5-year-old or for speaking your own native language. And I sat for three days listening to their stories. I hated being present. But I would have hated more to be absent. Being present leads us to lament.

And the final habit is to reimagine. Re-imagining is being open to new possibilities and better futures. A great leap of moral imagination that must happen collectively and with God. The relationship, the extraordinary love we witness in the Trinity and which Paul highlights in Colossians needs to far our imagination about what could be and what will be.

So, our overall aim is very simple. We are to glorify Christ, yet our divisions do not glorify Christ. The vision is beautiful, that of the Trinity, in which love ensures that unity and diversity are perfectly together. The challenge is overwhelming for the church around the world to stand in its diversity coming from varieties of culture and by setting aside all power for itself in every place, by a kenosis to make itself available to be driven out, driven out of its comfort zones. Not in habits of curiosity, not in fragments, but in habits of curiosity partnership which involves presence and imagination which springs from worship. Thank you.Â

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