

Read Archbishop Justin's speech at Wycliffe College on the legacy of colonialism and the Church's call to reconciliation.

First, I would like to thank Wycliffe College for this exceptionally generous award. It's deeply humbling to receive this honorary degree at the end of such an extraordinary visit to Canada. It's a wonderful culmination to a time of learning and listening, a traumatic time of learning and listening.

I sat down yesterday afternoon on the flight from Saskatoon and read through my address which was written a while ago and decided to replace it with something worse, which is what you're going to hear.

This really is my first attempt to raise questions which in recent years have more and more preoccupied me. I should say in advance that I do not hate the Church of England or the Anglican Communion or indeed God's church. The sins and failure to which I will refer are because the church is human in its incarnation, institutional in its structure and spiritual in its creation, vocation and calling.

In 2018 and 2019, I was cross-examined under oath, live-recorded, and streamed by the UK independent commission on child sexual abuse known as ICSA. The counsel for the enquiry, Miss Scolding QC, after almost 3 hours of looking at church failures and safeguarding going back to the 1950s, asked if I had anything to add. I was overwhelmed by grief and wept as I spoke from the shame I felt. I remember it so well because that feeling was with me all Saturday and Sunday. Shame at how the Institutional Church – the important word in this address – in its many forms behaved with people of colour coming to the UK in the 1950s-60s-70s-80s, and probably to this day.

Let us look back at the institutional support of colonialism by the church in many places: in the Honourable East India Company before the first national revolt in 1856, when the Church agreed they would not sing The Magnificat at evensong because they didn't want the natives getting ideas about overthrowing the powerful. In the 18th and 19th centuries, when the bishops of the Institutional Church of England were steadfastly opposed to abolition. During the Reformation with the burning of heretics. The Crusades and so on and so forth. In power and politics all the way back to the very first century. Look back to the 1930s, where the vast majority of faithful German Christians supported Hitler. Where the commandant of Auschwitz attended Mass every Sunday and was given communion. The church institution supported Hitler up to 1945 with only a small minority of noble exceptions such as the Confessing Church after the Barmen Declaration. Even today, churches support war, support capital punishment for gay people, support tyrannies and tyrants, and populists. Churches support exclusion and ex-communication and cover their sins with a coating of theology and hermeneutically flawed exegesis. They always have and they always will. It would be easy to hate Institutional churches and to think that some other system would work better, but even the briefest historical thinking shows that is untrue.

The questions I want to raise are therefore about that shadowy no man's land between the clarity of ecclesiological reflection as part of the discipline of theology and the clarity of ecclesial definition in the ecumenical movement.

As an evangelical theological seminary, the key is to do what every part of the church must do if we are to be faithful to the Christ, The Holy One. "I've sanctified them in the truth. Your word is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, so also, I sent them into the world. And I have been myself consecrated, sanctified in order that they also may be sanctified in the truth" John 17-19.

In John's Gospel truth - aletheia - is a keyword which as we all know is in answer to Thomas's question in John 14 at the beginning of the Last Supper discourses, "How do we find the way? We don't know the way. How do we find the way?" Jesus answers, "I'm the way, the truth and the life".

Aletheia is used to translate several words but especially a word that reveals God's utter reliability to be sanctified, consecrated, made holy. It's not just to be separate from sin passively, but to actively being truth in action. And that is the call of the body of Christ.

What we must do is start by understanding why church history, whether long ago and far away or close by and present, is such a remarkable category of disasters. Not only to understand, but to earth practical theology for change in the lived reality of church life.

We all know adequate answers are not found in church tribalism; evangelicals, charismatics, Anglo Catholics, all there on the other side. For in every tradition, there are similar stories. In the last two years, I've counted seven scandals amongst the evangelical groups in the Church of England which have hit the national press. Human sin. How do we live in that reality as an institutional church?

I recall a colleague at Trinity, Cambridge, when I was an undergraduate. He came from a town in Indiana called New Harmony. Derived from a town called Harmony, it was established by people who had come across the Atlantic to find a true Christian community. After a while they divided and formed New Harmony. Divisions, denial, all deviations from normative Christianity. Well, the problem with that is it's untrue. Deceit and cover-up eventually exposed, reformed with more rules, no more infallibly obeyed than the old customs and understandings, is too often normative.

Regulations which end up catching the innocent and distracting from the problem. Especially in the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand there is rejection, not of hope, but of hope in the church as the bearer of light when it is seen only through the lens of its hypocrisies.

How can it be that the church is capable of so much cruelty? If Jesus's prayer in John 17 matters at all, then none of these answers are adequate. Neither is a despairing shrug. Or a comment of Semper Eadem: "It's always been like that, and it always will be."

The last two days have been the sharpest possible reminder of the systematic abuse of power to the infinite harm of the most vulnerable - the children of First Nations, Metis and Inuit. A cruelly deliberate policy to exterminate cultures. It was political oppression at its most raw, employing methods of divide and conquer and institutions willing to be instruments. Worst of all were churches that did not fulfil their biblical historic vocation to be advocates, allies and brothers or sisters in Christ to the indigenous Inuit and Metis people. Instead of standing with them, we abandoned them. Instead of advocating for them we became complicit, sometimes directly responsible for residential schools and the isolation of people on reservations. Amid great poverty, in the face of suffering, the church shrugged and contributed to further hardship.

We promise to walk with the First Nation, Inuit and Metis and advocate for them as we would a family member. The chasm between the lived reality of indigenous people now and what could have been had the Church of England and others kept their commitments, is shaming and devastating. It has led to huge problems of intergenerational health, the liquidation of culture, spirituality and so much more. It has damaged their societies, opened ways to infinite suffering, to drugs and alcohol to escape, and to sexual abuse and all the consequences that flow from that.

History cannot truly be in the past until it has been healed. As new atrocities here and around the world come to light, the past is very much alive and remains extraordinarily painful today. The church participated in dehumanization, literally saying, "These people are not human", abusing those we should've embraced. The church was not there for them when we should have been their greatest friends.

The church belittled spirituality, denigrated, and undermined cultures, tradition and language, and abused rights. The church "we" also made the arrogant assumption that somehow, we brought God to you rather than seeking to understand you. The theological statement, "The God is Lord of all the earth was not absent before we got there". Like Paul, our task is to point to the full revelation of God, not to pretend there was no God. The Doctrine of Discovery dehumanized people whom Christ loved so much that he died for them. I've committed to working with Archbishops in the primate and to go on listening, to learn what we should do. And to the extent I can do something, I will. In the 1930s, when another group was selected for extermination, Bonhoeffer learned you might not be able to stop it but at least you could die with it.

This visit has been a visit for listening and learning, for humility and hope, for repentance and, I pray, reconciliation. The transformation and healing that God promises us is possible through Jesus. And that is why, immensely grateful as I am for this great honour, I know that I don't deserve it. It is an act of grace by you. Why my heart was so wounded by hearing survivor after survivor saying, "We don't blame the church. It wasn't you; it was them". I wanted to stand up and shout, "No! It was the church. The institutional church". This visit will, I hope, bring healing because it is possible through Jesus. And that is so important for the Church of England because reconciliation and unity is not just nice to have or the right thing to do, it is a gospel imperative.

Jesus's last prayer in John 17:21, "There may all be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me". I've commented already in this trip, there are only 3 problems with the divisions in the church, if you look through the Last Supper's discourses. First, it stops our assurance of salvation. Second, it stops our prayers being heard. And third, it renders our mission entirely ineffective.

Apart from that, our divisions have no adverse consequences at all. Repenting from sins and loving our neighbour is not just good, it's our calling, as Christians and as a church. We have our relationships with indigenous brothers and sisters in the Church of England's history and the Anglican Communion's history straight from the path God wants for his children. In the 2019 communique, the Anglican indigenous network said, "The apostle Paul in his writing talks about principalities and powers and how they separate us from God. Separation from God is sin. And one of the powers that impact our lives as indigenous people is the sin of racism". Our legacy of colonialism contains profound separation from God. Sin that needs repenting.

In our 21st century world, the biggest issues of our times are those that the indigenous community are often disproportionately affected by climate change, the pandemic, racism. What happened in the past is the foundation for today. Centuries of disparity, power and privilege have put us on different planes and mean that we have entirely different experiences. These systems of privilege and the notion of white and European supremacy played and possibly still play a great role in doing harm to people. They undermine our Gospel mission to tell the world that Jesus Christ is good news for everyone. Terrible things were done in the name of God — blasphemy at its most disgusting. The Doctrine of Discovery, as you know, laid the ground for many of the systems and institutions we still live with, as well as entrenching inequality and discrimination in our culture over the centuries. What can we do to heal this past, transform our present and create good for the future?

This is not an exhaustive list, but I suggest that true reconciliation requires, among many other things, several basic aspects. First, it cannot be imposed. But after many years, generations usually, the response to the radical change and willing sacrifice by the oppressor or stronger party off their power and prestige.

This is the model of Christ. Not that he was oppressor, but Christ did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped but — emptied himself, gave away everything. It is also what is defined in John 3:16 where the concept of world, in other parts of John's seen in a slightly more antithetical way, is not as somewhere to be discovered. Jesus — landing on earth and saying, — Wow! This is fascinating. Never knew about this place —, but at somewhere to be loved at all costs even when it is hostile. Second, the evidence of change is culture and culture come from profound reflection on what led us down the wrong path. 75 years of relative peace with the countries of Western Europe and North America. I know we had Vietnam and Iraq, but they were not quite what we're seeing today. Certainly, for the counties of the G7 has led to the same sense of naive anthropological optimism as was found in the church of 1914 when the first world war began. The successive blows of wars and holocausts emptied that optimism. It has returned. We need a reformed, in every sense, theological anthropology that takes seriously our institutions and their life. And prepare for Christians, especially ministers in orders to say no when they see things that are wrong. Not just theologically, but in action. The prophetic spirit speaks through the church in the scripture and must be through the institutions of the church today and that will only happen when people are taught that that is what should happen. Maybe you do that here. It is not enough for it to be individual or even episcopal. We need the institutions to have the mind of Christ. And that required intertextual work between as one example only, Roman's chapters 5-11 with the Last Supper discourses in John and especially in John 17. And yes, I do mean chapters 5 to 11.

The reformation has separated them far too long in the evangelical world. And 9 to 11 are the working out in the lived experience of the church of 5 to 8. Apology can only be acceptable genuinely if it is accompanied by action, that is the third point. What actions done with those oppressed by a collusive western church in every part of the world will indicate that heart and culture are being renewed. And that will mean enormous sacrifice for the institutional churches. I know that the Anglican Church of Canada is actively and passionately working to fulfil apologies made through the healing fund, through the all-party settlement agreement and ongoing work to resource indigenous ministries, including suicide prevention and education.

We can continue the work of the Anglican Church of Canada and in the Church of England, we can learn from their commitment to healing and reconciliation. Their work over the past 50 years supporting indigenous rights, recognizing, and respecting their culture, tradition and language and worked to heal the damage that has been done over the centuries must be supported and continued for it is a heavy, heavy burden. And we are to bear one another's burdens. There are other outstanding examples in the Anglican Communion. New Zealand, Australia including perhaps Sydney Darsi's with the Aboriginal populations. They set patterns from which to learn. And I'm so pleased that Wycliffe College is living out this vocation for reconciliation. Training indigenous people for leadership whether lay or ordained is vital if we want to acknowledge and Anglicanism that honours indigenous spirituality and welcomes, encourages, and empowers indigenous communities as equals. That will be good renewal across the whole communion.

You may imagine that I could rattle on for much longer. Archbishop's sort of do. But I want to end by saying thank you. Thank you to the ACC and to Archbishop Linda Nichols for their hospitality and what they are teaching me. Thank you to Wycliffe for this deeply unmerited, very gracious honour. But most of all, for your and leadership in evangelical theological thought and training. And I pray that the holy spirit will fill you here at Wycliffe with wisdom from above, from which we may all learn so that in reflection on the world and on the institutional church and how it has and does live and filled with love for God and for those God calls to salvation. You may inspire the whole church to new self-awareness, to repentance, to the form and to reconciliation. Thank you.

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