

Anglican churches are “deeply involved” in reconciliation work in conflict zones around the world, the Archbishop of Canterbury has said.

Speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington today, Archbishop Justin Welby said more than half of Anglican provinces are facing persecution or are in post-conflict or actual conflict.

The Archbishop also said the mainstreams of all faiths must “challenge and subvert” radicalisation and religiously-motivated violence within their traditions.

Later the same day the Archbishop preached at Virginia Theological Seminary where he spoke of the need for a united church focused on Jesus that serves the weakest and poorest amid their suffering.

'The DNA of Anglicanism'

Reflecting on his visits to every Anglican province during his first 18 months in office, the Archbishop said a “striking” common feature was Anglican involvement in reconciliation and meditation work.

“It seems to somehow be in the DNA of Anglicanism,” he said. “Despite our own differences, we seem to find ourselves doing this stuff.”

The Archbishop gave the example of a visit to Bor in South Sudan which has been ravaged by civil war. “What we found [there] was the Archbishop leading the reconciliation work. We see that all over the place.”

On taking office in 2013 the Archbishop announced that reconciliation – within and beyond the church – would be a key priority for his ministry.

“The more you see of [war] – and I spent quite a lot of time doing this, over quite a many years now, long before I was Archbishop – the agony that you see is beyond all description. And as many people here know, it sears the soul.”

The Archbishop said his role in supporting Anglicans to be reconcilers and meditators was “to bless that work of reconciliation and to strengthen it, and for us from Lambeth [Palace] to encourage and develop local skills in reconciliation where they are facing conflict.”

“What does that look like? I think it involves building skills and capacity in the way that you would expect, but it also involves a willingness to re-examine ourselves and our own role in conflict.”

The Archbishop said that over the last 10 years there has been “a development in all the major global faith traditions of a stream within them of radicalised violence. I don’t know why this is happening but I think it bears significant research. Why is that so many faith traditions are seeing a radicalisation of small but significant proportion of their adherents?”

“What is behind that, and how is the mainstream within each faith tradition strengthened to give a narrative that challenges and subverts sufficiently the narrative of the radicalised people?”

Reflecting on the geographical make-up of the Anglican Communion, the Archbishop explained that the average Anglican today is “an African woman in her thirties, living in sub-Saharan Africa on less than four dollars a day.”

By comparison Anglicans in the global north have become “the exception”, he said, adding: “On the whole we are, to use Pope Francis’ phrase, a poor church with the poor.”

Asked about the challenges facing such a diverse Communion in the 21st century, the Archbishop highlighted the way that technology has intensified global awareness of diversity.

“If you have a modern mobile phone, you have the entire world in your hand... through [social media], through news feeds, through blogs... it’s all there. But there’s no personal relationship. So you have diversity coming at you [at an] unprecedented rate.

“In the 19th century, when the divisions in the Anglican Communion were certainly as complicated as they are now, but they took several months to get to you by ship – now they come at you in microseconds, and yet you don’t have the personal face-to-face contact which enables you, in the way that diplomacy, through prayer, through interaction at a human level, through facing... to deal with that diversity.

The Archbishop said this challenge was not unique to the Anglican Communion but was typical of business, diplomacy and many other areas.

He said there are two ways to tackle this problem. “First of all we have to build structures that enable us to trust each other, and not to be drawn into conflict by our structures within any global institutions – and that’s a massive challenge.

“Secondly, you do have to spend time going to see people and sitting down with them and listening with them.”

[Watch the full interview on the Council on Foreign Relations website](#)

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