

Address to the Postgraduate Institute of Saints Cyril and Methodius

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby

Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of All England and Metropolitan

Wednesday 22 November 2017

Your Eminence, dear friends, I am pleased to be with you this morning in the last part of my visit to Moscow. Contacts between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of England have been active for centuries. The archives that are held in the library of Lambeth Palace bear witness to friendships over the years and to meetings between my predecessors and previous Patriarchs of Moscow. The Church of England benefitted from the presence in England of exiled Russian theologians during the twentieth century and it is good that our two churches are represented in the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue. Under the chairmanship of Metropolitan Kallistos, who is an Englishman, a monk of Athos and a Metropolitan from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and Archbishop Roger Herft from the Anglican Church of Australia, the Commission produced a remarkable agreed statement in 2015. The Buffalo Statement, named after the place rather than the animal, is entitled 'In the Image and Likeness of God: A hope-filled anthropology'. **[1]** This is one of the most compelling and important documents that has been published as a result of ecumenical dialogue in recent years and I commend it to you. It is to these themes – theology, anthropology and Christian hope – that I wish to speak this morning.

Anthropology and Ethics

When my predecessor, Archbishop Rowan Williams, and His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew laid down the mandate for the fourth round of Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue in 2007 the topics to be discussed were ethical. Yet the first report of this phase of dialogue was about theological anthropology rather than Christian ethics. Why? Because ethical issues cannot be considered in the abstract. It is a mistake to look at ethics in a way that is disconnected from our understanding of human beings. The hallmark of ethics is that they are held and acted on by human beings. Understanding what it is to be human and how human beings relate to God and to one another is a necessary first step to examining how human beings behave.

The Dialogue has now moved on to talk about important ethical issues: at its last meeting in Malta three weeks ago the dialogue began conversations about the environment and about end of life issues. But it is discussing these issues with the Buffalo Statement in mind. When questions are asked about human ethical decision-making they are answered not only with human individuals in mind but with persons in mind.

There is a distinction: human beings do not live in isolation; they are connected; they are persons that relate to other persons. There is a South

African proverb which says, 'I am because we are.' And personal relationships include the relationship with God. Each person is involved in a complex web of relationships beginning with the relationship that is within the Trinity; then the relation between God and humanity, relations within the human family, with the environment and with the natural world.

A term that is helpful to understand what this means is one that is not often used in the text itself but which has long been a favourite term in ecumenical dialogues – and that is *koinonia*. This Greek term can be variously translated into English as communion or community or fellowship – a oneness that is fundamental and deep and which is not easily broken. At the heart of the theological work of my predecessor, Rowan Williams, is *koinonia* as gift – the gift of God to us – and not as something we choose. Our communion with other Christians is not a matter of choice, it is a matter of gift. We are connected to one another as brothers and sisters not because we choose to be but because we are all children of God. In the same way the children of human parents cannot choose who their brothers and sisters are. It is a given. When individuals realise that they are not really individual but connected then the way any one individual makes ethical decisions changes.

God as Creator

'Our humanity cannot be understood properly apart from our relationship with God.' This statement from the Buffalo Statement is at the heart of Christian theological anthropology. A major problem with western society is an appalling individualism that fails to note that any one person's ethical decisions affect other people. The ultimate result of this is anarchy and an ethical nihilism. We know from the scriptures that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. As such each human being reflects the image, or 'icon', of God. And as the Statement develops this thought I would like to point out two particular points:

1. Being in the image and likeness of God is not something that is based only in some ethereal reality – we are not created in the image of a 'faceless, remote or abstract God'. We remember Jesus Christ, who is 'the image of the invisible God' (Colossians. 1.15). If you want to know what God is like – look to Jesus. If you want to understand how we are created in God's image, look to Jesus;
2. Being in the likeness of God involves dynamic interaction with God. When we co-operate freely in God's grace he draws us closer to him. This co-operation includes continually conforming ourselves to his will – which is where ethical rules and ways of living come from. The Christian way of seeking to order human life is to do so in a way that conforms to God's way, looking to Jesus primarily as our guide and example.

But we recognise, of course, the reality of sin and the Fall of humanity. It is easy to be downhearted about the Fall. But, as the Buffalo statement says; 'The divine image and likeness in the human person have been obscured through the Fall but not obliterated. In other words we are fallen yet not forlorn.' Human beings, though fallen, are free. Human beings have the gift of reason. Human beings therefore have the capacity to make reasoned decisions and reasonably to discern the way to act in a situation. There are multiple external pressures that affect our reason and our discernment, but we have choices to act either in accordance with God's will or against it. We have the capacity to act selfishly or for the common

good. We have the capacity to act individually or to recognise that we have relationships with each other.

These choices that we make are affected by the relationships we form.

Family and families

The place where most people forge their first relationships is within the family. It is easy, however, to define what makes up the family very narrowly. It is also easy to base ideas and ideals about the family on one's own experience. When I was a parish priest seeing couples preparing for marriage each of them came with an idea of what family was like based on their own experience. This is frequently a problem when a couple start on their own marriage with conflicting ideas of what a marriage and a family looks like and how it functions. It is just as problematic to consider as normative that which we have experienced as it is to build up an ideal based on what we would like to have experienced. The reality is that family life is and always has been complex.

In the United Kingdom in the last forty years there has been a great shift in the understanding and the reality of family life. Parish priests up and down the country tell me about their experience in the primary schools in their parishes (and the Church of England educates around one million children in five thousand Church schools), where children are brought up in a myriad of different combinations of family – some where parents are married, some where they are together but not married; single parents; step parents and step and half brothers and sisters; grandparents acting as the principal carers; guardians; single-mothers with men who come and go; and much more. I have five children and I remember one of my sons being in a class at school where he was the only one of thirty children who lived in a home with both his parents who were married to each other.

In recent years in a number of nations, including the United Kingdom, same- sex, or as it is called in law, Equal marriage is now understood to be normal, acceptable and unchallengeable in many countries, whereas as late as the 1990s the very idea would have been heard as incomprehensible, revolutionary and perhaps absurd. But 70-90% of people in the UK see it as acceptable and unchallengeable. The speed of change has led many constituencies such as churches and other faith groups to find themselves living in a culture that they have not even begun to come to terms with. Every Christian denomination and church struggles with the results.

Religious Life and Friendship

Two parts of the Buffalo Statement's treatment of relationships that I think are important are those touching monasticism and friendship. In the modern age, particularly among the young, the idea of a fulfilling life without a sexual relationship seems absolutely impossible. Yet in the Christian tradition the monastic life has been of foundational importance. The monastic life had a chequered history in the last five hundred years of the Church of England. The dissolution of the monasteries was a key part of King Henry VIII's dismantling of the medieval church.

Religious communities were re-established in the nineteenth century and the revival of the religious life is my first priority in ministry along with

prayer. Where I live, at Lambeth Palace in central London, there are two small religious communities. On the one hand we have a small number of members of the Chemin Neuf community, an ecumenical community with its roots in the Catholic Church in France. The people that make up that community comprise married couples, single people and single people in consecrated vows. They live out a community-based religious vocation but from within different family structures. The second community, led by the first, is the Community of St Anselm: a project now in its third year where young people from all around the world and from different churches who come together for 'a year in God's time'. They live either in community at Lambeth Palace or in the world, they make a simple temporary vow and devote themselves to prayer, study and service of the poor in London. After a year they leave. When they arrive we have no idea how the year of community life will change them, nor can we predict where they will go. Some will go on to live consecrated religious life, some to ordained ministry, others to marriage and family life and service in their own place. All will have been formed and affected by the relationships they forge in that community.

The second passage that particularly struck me was the statement's treatment of friendship. Friendship is often overlooked when people talk about relationships but it is the universal, overarching relationship that is available to all – be they married or single; in religious or secular life. Friendship is not abstract, it is a relationship between two real persons. It is deep-rooted and energising and the significant depth of friendship is shown in the sense of deep loss when a friendship is broken or a friend is lost through death. In the spiritual patrimony of both the Eastern and Western church we have examples of true friendship – in the East there is the example of the friendship between St John Chrysostom and St Olympias the Deaconess and in the West the writings of our English St Aelred of Rievaulx on Spiritual Friendship are some of the most beautiful to come out of the medieval Cistercian tradition. 'God is friendship ...' paraphrases Aelred, 'and he who abides in friendship abides in God and God in him.' Here he deliberately shows the depth of love that is in true friendship.

The family, however it is experienced, is the place where we can be at our strongest and most secure; but it can also be where we are at our most vulnerable. Research shows that a large proportion of abuse takes place within the family. But the good family is the foundational intermediate institution in society, and one to which every human being necessarily belongs in one way or another. It addresses issues of care, of isolation and of rootlessness. It is a gift of God in any society, bearing burdens, supporting the vulnerable and stabilizing both those who believe themselves autonomous and those who feel themselves to be failures.

Ultimately, our identity and our true family is found in Christ. Jesus himself said that the true family are those who do God's will: 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother' (Mark 3.35). The family and the relationships within it point to the relationship that we have with the Triune God.

Hope

'Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things', writes the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. God is free and, created in God's image,

human beings also are free. Human freedom is freedom in two ways. First we are freed through God's grace from the slavery of sin and freed from the fear of death by the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This gives us hope. Second, we are free to make choices in the light of this freedom.

The fact that we humans are endowed with freedom means that every human person lives out the image and likeness of God in his or her unique and distinctive way. There are as many different ways of loving and serving God as there are different human persons. The variety and complexity of human beings are well expressed in two Jewish sayings: 'God never does the same thing twice', and 'the world has need of every single human person'.

As we live as those who are freed from bondage to sin and make our choices to conform ourselves to the will of God we become more 'like' God. Ultimately this is brought to fulfilment in eternity. To quote once again from the Buffalo Statement 'Our right use of freedom, our pilgrimage from image to likeness, our membership of the mystical Body of Christ, all point towards the completion of our human nature and the transformation of all creation on the Last Day. This is our true fulfilment, the ultimate joy of all creation, our eternal sharing in the Trinitarian life of love.'

Our understanding of the human person is down to earth and realistic, but it is also full of hope. We profess a hope-filled anthropology as the basis for all our ethical decision making. Thank you.

[1] 'In the Image and Likeness of God: A Hope-Filled Anthropology' The Buffalo Statement agreed by the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2015).

12 min read

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/archbishop-gives-lecture-christian-hope-moscow>