

The Archbishop of Canterbury

Concluding Presidential Address to the Lambeth Conference 2008

3 August 2008

I began the second of these plenary addresses with a reminder of the question, 'What is Lambeth '08 going to say?' And I suggested that we also needed to ask 'Where are we going to speak *from*?' I hope that in recent days there has been some growing clarity about both of these questions and how we answer them : but today there is no avoiding the question of the central message, and I have the rather dangerous task of trying to discern some of what that message might be and to share with you what I perceive. I'll do this by moving from the obvious and more superficial level to what I hope is a more fully theological perspective, so bear with me on the journey - even in the middle of a summer afternoon!

The first thing to say about this Conference - and I say it with gratitude and admiration to all of you - is that it has been a time when everyone has taken responsibility for everyone else. People have been loyal to the process devised - even when they have had serious difficulties and objections to it; and in so doing they have been loyal to one another. The level of commitment has been shown not only in people's steady involvement in the work of the groups but also in their reluctance to step outside the Conference and look for a platform or an audience elsewhere.

That sense of taking responsibility is only one expression of what person after person has said to me : 'There is no *desire* to separate.' When we have discussed - as we've had to - the possibilities of remaining divided or becoming more so, no-one has relished this or thought it a good outcome in terms of our mission. And our guest speakers have, with surprising consistency (no, it wasn't planned that way) affirmed our capacity to bear with one another patiently as one of the great gifts they saw in us. Whatever else we say, we must thank GOD for this - and for having been able to hold to a method of discussion and sharing that has allowed us to go on meeting one another trustfully and not without sacrifice. One of my hopes is that something of what we've learned in the indaba style of encounter may be translated into the way we do our business as churches in our home contexts.

But this is a point where we have to note the temptation to congratulate ourselves, and to be rather careful. 'Anglicans are a profoundly diverse community who nonetheless live tolerantly with each other' : we've all said it, and it sounds wonderful, but it can conceal some fault-lines - and some wounds as well. On its own, it could mean that nothing *matters* enough to us to understand why some conflicts are unavoidable and very costly - why some feel we put unity before truth, and so feel we have no very deep sense of truth itself.

So, assuming we don't, indeed, want to separate, what's the unity we value so much? Is it only a sense of human loyalty or a warmth towards the people we've shared an experience with? If so, there is nothing distinctively Christian in it. It may be admirable and good, but other sorts of community might do it as well. And if we just 'tolerate' each other, that can in fact be an attitude well short of real respect or love. Beyond peaceful diversity lies *Christian* unity; and this is what should matter to us.

Christian unity : first and above all, this is union with Jesus Christ; accepting his gift of grace and forgiveness, learning from him how to speak to his Father, standing where he stands by

the power of the Spirit. We are one with one another because we are called into union with the one Christ and stand in his unique place - stand *in* the Way, the Truth and the Life. Our unity is not mutual forbearance but being summoned and drawn into the same place before the Father's throne. *That* unity is a pure gift - and something we can think of in fear and trembling as well as wordless gratitude; because to be in that place is to be in the light of absolute Truth, naked and defenceless. St John's gospel has been reminding us that the place of Jesus is not a place where ordinary, fallen human instinct wants to go. Yet it's where we belong, and where GOD the Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ want us to be, for our life, our joy and our healing.

That's the unity which is inseparable from truth. It's broken not when we simply disagree but when we stop being able to see in each other the same kind of conviction of being called by an authoritative voice into a place where none of us has an automatic right to stand. Christians divided in the sixteenth century, in 1930's Germany and 1980's South Africa because they concluded, painfully as well as (often) angrily, that something had been substituted for the grace of Christ - moral and ritual achievement, or racial and social pride, as if there were after all a way of securing our place before GOD by something other than Jesus Christ.

Now all this might help us to see why Christian communities express their unity in so many visible, tangible ways. They read the same Bible in public and private, and shape their words and actions in conformity with it - or at least they try to. They seek for consistent practices around the sacraments, so that the baptism or eucharist of each community can be recognised by others as directed in the same way, working under the same authority. It happens in different ways and different degrees in different Christian confessions and families of churches; but all Christian communities have some such practice.

And this is emphatically not about forcing others to conform ; it is an agreement to identify those elements in each other's lives that build trust and allow us to see each other as standing in the same Way and the same Truth, moving together in one direction and so able to enrich and support each other as fully as we can. What I am saying, in effect, is that every association of Christian individuals and groups makes some sort of 'covenant' for the sake of mutual recognition, mutual gratitude and mutual learning.

Does this mean that we are all restricted by each other's views and preferences, incapable of arguing or changing? It was a problem familiar to St Paul, and you have already, in this Conference, heard something of how he dealt with it. But let me try to say how this affects our current difficulties. A fellow-Christian may believe they have a profound fresh insight. They seek to persuade others about it. A healthy church gives space for such exchanges. But the Christian with the new insight can't claim straight away that *this* is now what the Church of GOD believes or intends; and it quite rightly takes a long time before any novelty can begin to find a way into the public liturgy, even if it has been widely agreed. Confusion arises when what is claimed as a new discernment presents itself as carrying the *Church's* authority.

And that's why the pleas for continuing moratoria regarding certain new policies and practices have been uttered. Such pleas have found wide support across the range of views represented in the indaba groups. The Church in its wider life can't be committed definitively by the judgment of some; but when a new thing is enshrined, in whatever way, in public order and ministry, it will look like a definitive commitment. The theological ground for a plea for moratoria is the need to avoid this confusion so that discernment continues

together. The Resolution of Lambeth '98 was an attempt to say *both* 'We need understanding and shared discernment on a hugely complex topic,' *and* 'We as the bishops in council together are not persuaded that the new thoughts offered to us can be reconciled with our shared loyalty to Scripture.' Perhaps we should read that Resolution - forgetting for a moment the bitterness and confusion around the debate and acknowledging that it remains where our Communion as a global community stands - as an attempt to define what a healthy Church might need - space for study and free discussion without pressure, pastoral patience and respect, unwillingness to change what has been received in faith from Scripture and tradition. And this is not by any means to say that a traditional understanding and a new one are just two equal options, like items on the supermarket shelf : the practice and public language of the Church act always as a reminder that the onus of proof is on those who seek a new understanding. To say that the would-be innovator must be heard gratefully and respectfully is simply to acknowledge the debt we always owe to those who ask unfamiliar questions, because they prompt us to explore our tradition more deeply.

It's worth adding, too, that the call for a moratorium on interventions across provinces belongs in the same theological framework. Such interventions often imply that *nothing* within a province, no provision made or pastoral care offered, can be recognizably and adequately Christian; and this is a claim not lightly to be made by any Christian community regarding any other without grave breach of charity. And it seems to be widely agreed in this Conference that internal pastoral and liturgical care, strengthened by arrangements like the suggested Communion Partners initiative in the USA and the proposed Pastoral Forum we have been discussing, are the way we should go if we want to avoid further ecclesial confusion.

So I hope that, if part of the message of Lambeth '08 is that we need to develop covenantal commitments, and that one aspect of this may be what you could call covenanted restraint, this will be seen in the context of a unity not enforced but given in Christ. To embrace deeper and more solid ways of recognizing and trusting each other can be a grace not a burden; and when trust is deepened, more responsible and prayerful discussions can follow. As has been said, there will be those for whom 'covenanted restraint' is conscientiously hard, even impossible. And to my mind this simply means there are steps they cannot take towards a deeper unity - or rather that they conceive such a deeper unity in other ways; their questions must still be valued by us, even if the answers are not the same.

And even here - what if we let the language of covenant develop in different ways? Dioceses and provinces may enter formal engagements. But is there anything to stop an individual bishop - whether or not committed to a Covenant for the Communion - making a particular covenant with a bishop elsewhere in the world, for prayer and support? It is a development of what I sketched in one of the retreat addresses, the idea that a shared rule of life might be adopted by bishops who have drawn close to each other in these days; and I know from what some of you have said to me that this appealed to many.

But let me turn briefly to another dimension of all this, so as to draw in considerations of other matters we've discussed. I have just said something of what might be involved in a covenanted future, and I believe - as I said on Thursday - that it has the potential to make us *more* of a church; more of a 'catholic' church in the proper sense, a church, that is, which understands its ministry and service and sacraments as united and interdependent throughout the world. That we wanted to move in such a direction would in itself be a weighty message. But it might even be a prophetic one. The vision of a global Church of interdependent

communities is not the vision of an ecclesiastical world empire - or even a colonial relic... The global horizon of the Church matters because churches without this are always in danger of slowly surrendering to the culture around them and losing sight of their calling to challenge that culture. The Church of England was, for a long time, so involved in the structures of power in this nation that it had little to say that was properly critical : part of its awakening in the last century and a half is due to its slow but steady recognition that it had come to belong to a global fellowship.

But, more sharply still, think of those churches struggling to keep alive a truthful Christian witness in situations of profound social corruption and disorder. In recent years, we have seen one element in a local church so allied to an oppressive regime and a culture of violence that it became a matter of scandal for all Christians in the country. I'm talking, of course, about Zimbabwe; and I think it is true to say that part of the wonderful recovery of the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe was due to the passion of Zimbabwean Anglicans to stay united with the rest of the Anglican family - and refusing to accept that justice, human rights and public welfare could be defined differently in Zimbabwe from how they were understood everywhere else in the world. To the massive courage and integrity of our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters, I know we'd all want to pay tribute; we stand with you, grateful for the gift of your witness.

But that's a powerful reminder that a global church and a global faith are not just about managing internal controversy. Our global, Catholic faith affirms that the image of GOD is the same everywhere - in the Zimbabwean woman beaten by police in her own church, in the manual scavenger in India denied the rights guaranteed by law; in the orphan of natural disaster in Burma, in the abducted child forced into soldiering in Northern Uganda, in the hundreds of thousands daily at risk in Darfur and Southern Sudan, in the woman raising a family in a squatters' settlement in Lima or Buenos Aires. *This* is the Catholic faith : that what is owed to them is no different from, no less than what is owed to any of the rest of us. That was the faith to which we witnessed in our march in London. And if the message of this Conference is silent about this, something has gone very wrong.

For one facet of the covenant that holds us together, as Jonathan Sacks so unforgettably reminded us, is the fact that we have been brought together in the small space of this planet, charged with treating its resources responsibly and sharing them justly. And our calling, therefore, is to make that further step to a 'covenant of faith' that will promise to our fellow human beings the generosity GOD has shown us; that will honour the absolute and non-negotiable dignities of all and strengthen us to resist any policy or strategy that implies that what is good and just for me is not good and just for all my human neighbours.

So is this our message? Our Communion longs to stay together - but not only as an association of polite friends. It is seeking a deeper entry into the place where Christ stands, to find its unity there. To that end, it is struggling with the question of what mutual commitments will preserve faithful, grateful relationship and common witness. But it must remember too that the place where Christ stands is also every place where GOD's image is disfigured by the rebelliousness and injustice of our world — just as he once stood in the place of every rejected and lost human being in his suffering on the cross. To be with him in unity, in prayer and love, in intimacy with the Father, is at the same time to be with him among the rejected and disfigured.

This is the Catholic Church; this is the Catholic faith - a global vision for a global wound, a global claim on our service. None of it is intelligible without belief in the one divine Saviour, raised from the dead, pouring out the gifts of his Spirit. To our Communion many gifts have been given, and GOD wills to give many more if we let him. In these days together we have not overcome our problems or reinvented our structures : that will still take time. We have quite a strong degree of support for a Pastoral Forum to support minorities, a strong consensus on the need to examine how the Instruments of Communion will best work, and a recognition - though still with many questions - that a Covenant is needed. We have a strongly expressed intention to place our international development work on a firmer and more co-ordinated footing. Where will the work be done? Before the ACC meeting next year - which will be a significant element in implementing our vision - I intend to convene a Primates' Meeting as early as possible in 2009. I shall look within the next two months for a clear and detailed specification for the task and composition of a Pastoral Forum, and I shall ensure that the perspectives of various groups looking at the Covenant and the Windsor process, as well as the Design Group for this Conference help to shape the implementation of the agenda outlined in the Reflections document, and are fed into the special meeting in November of the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the ACC. We may not have put an end to all our problems - but the pieces are on the board. And in the months ahead it will be important to invite those absent from Lambeth to be involved in these next stages. Much in the GAFCON documents is consonant with much of what we have sought to say and do, and we need to look for the best ways of building bridges here.

But in conclusion, what is most important is to say to you that it is *your* work, your patient, lively, impatient, hopeful engagement with each other that has, by GOD's grace, brought us where we are. My heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you for your fidelity to the life of this Conference, your patience in prayer - and your generous encouragement of your President! As you return, be bearers of good news to all your communities - above all, of the Good News of Our Lord's promise that where he is, there his servants will be. There is our unity, there is our hope, there is the gift we have celebrated and, I trust, rediscovered in our time together. Thanks be to GOD.