

HOBART LECTURE
by
The Most Rev. Njongonkulu Ndungane
Primate of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa
at
Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City
November 3, 2004

My dear sisters and brothers, I greet you in the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a great honour to give the Hobart Lecture. Thank you for inviting me to be with you, and speak on ‘The Pastoral Care of the People of God.’

Richard Hooker had this to say on the subject: ‘He which will set the hearts of other men on fire with the love of Christ, must himself burn with love’ (Serm.VI.33).

The feast of this Elizabethan architect of Anglicanism is celebrated today in much of the Anglican Communion – though yesterday on this side of the Atlantic.

Much quoted in recent months, his influence resonates through the Windsor Report, with which we have become so occupied. Also in our minds are yesterday’s elections, and their implications for America, and for the world as a whole – especially the poor, the weak, the suffering.

I am convinced ‘The Pastoral Care of the People of God’ is fundamentally linked with all three of these preoccupations – the Windsor Report, the elections and global poverty, and I shall return to each of these throughout my lecture.

Jesus, the Source of All Ministry

But let us begin, as Hooker does, with Jesus!

Jesus is the source, the strength, the focus and the end of the life of ministry. It is Jesus’ love we are called to share with God’s people – whether they pass through the doors of our church or whether they are on the other side of God’s world. We are to share it regardless of who wins the Presidential election!

Pastoral care also means shepherding people so they can encounter Jesus. It is helping them to receive his love and his salvation, to respond by opening their lives to him, and to grow in that maturity which is the Christlike life. We must all be open to the constant process of being formed and reformed, moulded and remoulded, until we achieve ‘the full stature of Christ’ (Eph 4:13)

The ordinal of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa says this in the Charge to priests:

‘You have come to respond to the call from God heard in your heart and confirmed by the Church, to be priest, pastor and teacher, together with your Bishop and fellow presbyters, for God’s glory and the strengthening of his people. Your answer to that call is a lifetime of ministry in the following of Christ. You will only be able to maintain that response by an ever-deepening practice of prayer, enriched by daily reading and study of holy Scripture. You will depend not on your own strength, but on the Holy Spirit of God and his grace given in word and sacrament.’

A terrible warning and a wonderful assurance. We, and those we pastor, must depend on making Jesus Christ the heart of our lives. Daily we must spend time in quiet prayer – listening as well as speaking – reading the Scriptures, waiting on the Lord. This is how we learn to love him more, this is how he will set his flame of love alight in our deepest beings. This is how he will teach and lead us in his ways.

Jesus, the Source of Unity

And this is how we will find unity. Like Christian maturity, unity is to be found in relationship with Jesus.

‘In Christ all things hold together’ (Col 1:17). What matters is that we hold fast to him.

So when I am asked ‘Archbishop, are you for this?... Are you against that?’ my reply is, ‘I am for Jesus!’

I am for everything that helps those who are made in the image of God to grow into the fullness of that image, so they might attain to the full stature of Christ. And I am against all that detracts our attention from him who is the ‘author and perfecter of our faith’ (Heb 12:2).

If ‘nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom 8:39), then nothing can separate us from those others who are held in the love of Christ Jesus their Lord. I am sure it is no accident that the very first section of the Windsor Report is headed ‘The communion we have been given in Christ.’

It records how the unity of the Church, and the communion of all its members, flow from God’s Trinitarian life and purposes. So does the call of all Christ’s people to radical holiness (#3).

Radical holiness, for me, describes that persistent daily effort to live out our baptismal promises: reorienting ourselves away from ‘sin, the flesh and the devil’ – from all that diminishes the image of God within us and in others; from all that separates us from a closer walk with him. Instead we turn, again and again, to refocus our lives on the Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver. We turn our backs on what is not of God. In humility, acknowledging our dependence, we make Jesus the touchstone of our lives.

Christian Diversity - Trinity

Yet the fact remains: devout and faithful Christians often find themselves beset with serious differences of opinion.

This should not surprise us. We worship a God who is complex in his Trinitarian nature. The Genesis stories stress the teeming variety with which he creates. Diverse creation is pregnant with creative possibilities.

I am convinced that the Trinity offers us powerful and fertile resources for living in celebration of our created diversity, as I stressed in my statement on the Windsor Report.

The God who is three Persons and yet One, creates us in his image. God is Trinity, this mysterious concept so hard to define and yet available to our experience: nurturing Creator, redemptive Saviour, life-giving Spirit; an enigmatic community of persons – distinct individuals and yet inseparable, united in love, for ‘God is love.’

So God creates us, to be in loving community with one another; a community that reflects the revealed life of the Trinity. These three mystical persons, distinct yet complementary, are one in purpose. None of the three is superior, nor inferior, to the others; none acts independently of the others, but always with mutual awareness and in relation; none takes over another’s particular role or characteristics or responsibilities; none acts at the expense of another. They are always open to one another, but never consumed or indistinct. Indeed, they show us what it is to enjoy freedom within a relationship of interdependence, a living example of the autonomy-in-communion which the Report explores.

Can we live and work and order our world like this? Granting everyone equal status, equal opportunity? With give and take? Prepared to share together, equitably, honestly and vulnerably? Living reciprocally rather than hierarchically? Conscious of being bound in a single shared humanity, in which, if one suffers, all suffer?

This must be our model – for our socio-political and economic life, and for our life within the body of Christ.

One in Christ

In Christ we are one with Christians of every age and place. Therefore we can have confidence that encounter with Christians of different traditions, cultures and experiences can only enrich us. I encourage you - do not be daunted by those with whom you differ! God’s Spirit lives in every one of us – what we share is greater than what divides us. As Paul says, ‘As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. In Christ there is no longer slave or free, Jew or Greek, male or female, for all of you are one in Jesus Christ’ (Gal 3:27,28)

During the Lambeth Conference, Bishops met daily for almost three weeks, for Bible study and faith sharing. At first it often seemed mutual comprehension was beyond us –

but the transformation as time went on was quite remarkable. We were profoundly enriched by encountering the living Christ in the lives and experiences of our brothers and sisters from very different places – and we learnt to recognise authentic faith in very different guises.

Hooker understood the need for a locally embodied ecclesiology in each particular time and place. Yet for him it was vital to see that this stemmed from the one, shared, foundation of the Church, which lies in God reaching out to us in Jesus. (III.i.2,10).

The Inter Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission has explained it like this: ‘the Anglican Communion is not just an accidental coming together of the like-minded but an historical adventure of finding the reality of Christ in diversity and circumstances.’

This is the adventure in which all Christians are engaged, whether at the global, provincial, diocesan, or parish level.

Particularly at the parish level, the reality of Christ in diverse circumstances comes to us through the pastoral encounter. Here, issues like sexuality are not the stuff of academic theology, but the tangible reality of individual lives.

Now, I do not suggest that within the pastoral encounter we can disregard theology! But neither can theologians disregard the reality of human experience. As we digest and respond to the Windsor Report, we must acknowledge that, in the Communion as a whole, we have by no means exhausted the commitment in Lambeth Resolution 1:10 to ‘listen to the experience of homosexual persons.’

I hope that as the Instruments of Unity address how we might receive and respond to the Report, they will also affirm this ongoing requirement to listen, and to continue sensitive pastoral care. We must pay further attention to local missionary imperatives and acceptable variety in pastoral practice. We should explore further both the differences and parallels with our handling of women’s ordination.

Expressing Difference

At the Lambeth Conference, I chaired Section 4 whose report, ‘Called to Full Humanity’ included the chapter on human sexuality. This ended with these words: ‘The challenge to our Church is to maintain its unity while we seek, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discern the way of Christ for the world today with respect to human sexuality. To do so will require sacrifice, trust and charity towards one another, remembering that ultimately the identity of each person is found in Christ.’

Trust and charity – there is no excuse for neglecting either!

Richard Hooker put it this way, ‘Pray God that none may be offended if I seek to make the Christian religion an inn where all may be received joyously rather than a cottage where some few friends or family might be entertained.’

Yet, even within a welcoming inn, certain standards of behaviour are expected.

As Archbishop William Temple said:

‘It is a sad reflection upon the sincerity of the Christian discipleship that so often in the history of the Church controversy has been conducted with bitterness and has been associated, as both cause and effect, with personal animosity. It is truly said that to become bitter in controversy is more heretical than to espouse with sincerity and charity the most devastating theological opinions . . .’

How little we change! The challenge to us in Christian leadership is to go beyond our egos and personal agendas. Even when we find our own identity as Christians threatened, we should have courage to say with honesty ‘This is God’s church – what does he require of me, of us?’

Autonomy-in-Communion

The Windsor Report has such rich theological and spiritual resources to offer us. In particular, I have found the sections reflecting on ‘autonomy-in-communion’ and the mutuality of interdependence profoundly moving.

There is so much to digest, and we must take our time. Indeed, it is vital that all parties have the space to work through all that the report says – and on our knees, as well as in our studies. We should not jump to conclusions, nor paint ourselves or others into corners.

The Primates’ meeting in February will be the first of the Instruments of Unity formally to consider the report. I am sure our primary concern will be to encourage all Anglicans to engage in a serious and thorough process of reflection and response, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We can pride ourselves on being a Church in which laity, clergy and bishops participate in our synodical decision-making. It took a year to produce. I am sure it will take us far longer to respond!

As Robin Eames stresses in his Foreword, the Windsor Report ‘is not a judgment. It is part of a process. It is part of a pilgrimage towards healing and reconciliation.’

The pilgrim journey happens one step at a time. It has taken two thousand years to come this far – we need not be hasty.

But we must not take the Report lightly – it is not a so-called ‘typical Anglican fudge’ that defers addressing the real issues, in the hope they will go away. It places deep and serious questions before all of us, and requires answers.

It also addresses concerns that I fully recognise and acknowledge in its suggestions for a Covenant and Council of Advice. These are highly complex issues with ramifications beyond those put before us so far. We must take time in weighing how best to respond.

The Bonds of Self-Giving Love

Yet the Report offers far more than questions and institutional suggestions. We shall breathe new life into our Communion if we engage with it thoroughly and seriously.

It reminds us that the commitments Provinces have to one another are not primarily legal contracts, even if set out in canon law. Their basis is the covenant love which the Lord has for all his Church.

His is the love of reckless self-giving. ‘While we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom 5:8)

The second person of the Trinity did not view the incarnation in terms of ‘What’s in it for me?’ No, ‘the Son of God loved me, and gave himself for me’ (Gal 2:20).

This is the nature of the bonds of affection that tie us – Provinces and individuals – to him and to each other.

Are we properly heeding Paul’s call to ‘consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus, who emptied himself ... taking the form of a servant’ (Phil 2:3-8).

This is a ‘tough ask.’

As Paul tells the Corinthians, “‘All things are lawful,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of others’ (1 Cor 10:23,24).

How do we balance the needs of competing ‘others’?

Paul advises, ‘do everything for the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or Greeks or to the Church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.’ (1 Cor 10:31-11:1)

Reading the Scriptures

Yet again, the answer again sends us back to the person of Jesus.

There is no alternative to this focus on Jesus in prayer, immersion in Scripture, and pursuit of ordination promises to keep studying and learning – not just reading that which affirms our understanding, but daring to risk fertile encounters with other perspectives.

Our God is a living God. We must expect his revelation of himself to us to be dynamic not static. There are times when it seems he moves his own goal-posts!

Rowan Williams, leading the Primates in Bible Study, reflected on Jesus' promise that the Spirit of Truth 'will guide us into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears.' He said it was as if the Spirit eavesdrops on the Father and the Son as they discuss the current state of the world and the Church, and this is what he then whispers in our ear!

I rather liked this illustration.

It is an encouragement to come afresh to Scripture expectant of new insights. Jesus said, 'Every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of the storeroom new treasures as well as old' (Mt 13:52).

Ah – scriptural interpretation. Now I, who love to quote the Bible, am really on dangerous ground!

'Within Anglicanism,' says the Windsor Report, 'scripture has always been recognised as the Church's supreme authority, and as such ought to be seen as a focus and means of unity' – and then there are ten further paragraphs describing how scripture and its interpretation have tragically become a source of painful disputation. (#53-62)

Richard Hooker would not have been surprised at the fact of our disagreement, even though he would have been appalled at the extent of it. He wrote, 'Let us not think that as long as the world doth endure, the wit of man shall be able to sound the bottom of that which may be concluded out of scripture' (I.xiv.3)

I am certain of this at least: If we are forced back to the Bible, to read it more thoroughly, deeply, thoughtfully, prayerfully – humbly beseeching God to lead us into his truth – then the consequences can only be for the good.

Submitting ourselves to scripture does something vital and profound. It puts us in touch with the power of the Holy Spirit, the power that raised Christ from death. It draws us into God's ongoing activity of redeeming, transforming, and sanctifying.

We do not rely only on our own effort but will experience the power of God at work in us and through us, to will and to do his purposes. We need God's mighty help, whether striving for unity and truth, or tackling the demands of pastoral ministry.

Then there is worship, which also draws us into deepening encounters with the Living God. Though the Windsor Report addresses our shared Anglican liturgical heritage, we should emphasise more the importance of actually worshipping together as part of the building up of our common life.

We must lay ourselves open, together, to the possibilities of God's intervention within us, cleansing and healing us, and drawing us closer to him and to each other.

Christ and Culture

Yet Christian maturity is not just about an inner spirituality. Christian maturity engages the whole of life. Jesus was not slow in weighing the wider culture of his day.

In this election week, it goes without saying that we must help people bring a critical Christian discernment to the world around. That applies as much to the debate about homosexuality as to the pursuit of American interests within the wider world; as much to contemporary value systems as to the domestic economic policies of the Presidential candidates.

Critical Christian discernment applies to every culture – indeed, the first Lambeth Conference was in part prompted by disagreements over the inculturation of the gospel among the Zulu people of South Africa. The debate about authentic African Christianity is still going on!

And of course, it always will. The question is always with us – what is the gospel saying here and now, in this time and place? Clear answers are not always evident. The difference between appropriate inculturation and disastrous syncretism is often not as obvious as we would like. Yet we are called to be God's prophetic voice in the world.

When I wonder what Jesus would make of the world around, I return to his 'manifesto,' set out in the synagogue at Nazareth:

'The Spirit of the Lord ... has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Lk 4:18,19).

'How good is this policy at bringing good news to the poor?' I ask myself. 'Does this attitude in society liberate, or oppress?' 'Lord, where are our blind spots, where we need recovery of sight?!'

Here is another question I ask myself. 'What does holiness mean in this situation?'

Contemporary culture can talk about good and bad – even about 'axes of evil'! – but when did you last hear about holiness on the news? I wish we could recapture the vocabulary of holiness through the whole of life.

America and the World

We must never forget that the prime calling of the Church is to serve God's mission in God's world. As James warns, 'Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead' (Jas 2:17).

Christians are called to be the Light of the World – the whole world. 9/11 brought home how this truly is a ‘small world’ in which all are vulnerable. Interdependence is a political, economic and security reality. Christians must advance the dawning recognition that everyone must work together for the common good – this too is pastoral care. True security is found not in military strength, but in ensuring every person has access to the essentials of a fully human life. This is the sort of security spending the world needs most.

America has faced so much in recent years. ‘Normal life’ was overturned on 9/11. The struggle over what is an appropriate response to changed circumstances still goes on. Now you are the only superpower. Surely it is for this great nation to give a lead in ensuring world affairs are governed through policies that uphold equity, fairness, and the well-being of all humanity; and that espouse good stewardship of all God’s creation, for this generation and generations to come.

When I visit the US, as I often do, I am struck by the particular challenges faced by the Church of God in America – part of the world’s most powerful nation, and yet called to preach the gospel of the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the marginalised.

It is an awesome task. But do not be daunted! We have God’s promise that he will help us! As the Lord told Joshua, ‘Be strong and stand firm! Be fearless and undaunted! For, go where you may, Yahweh your God is with you!’ (Jos 1:9)

Joshua heard those words as he prepared to lead God’s people into the Promised Land. They feared the way ahead would be barred by giants, while they were a small and insignificant band. But God assured them he knew what he was doing. He would lead them through.

We all need to remind ourselves of his promises. Together, we can have confidence to tackle the giants before us. When I look around, and I am filled with hope at the signs of God leading us forward.

Millennium Development Goals and the Micah Initiative

In 2000, the global community made the most comprehensive commitment ever to tackle poverty and all its consequences, in the Millennium Development Goals.

Heading the list is reducing absolute poverty by half, and reducing hunger by half, by 2015. In the long term we must eradicate both. Other goals include lowering child mortality and improving maternal health; universal primary education; combating HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria; and sustainable access to clean drinking water.

Economists tell us we can do all this. Alongside military spending, which this year will top a trillion dollars (a thousand billion), the cost is tiny! What is in question is whether we, our governments, businesses and institutions, have the will power.

Here Christians can make a difference.

Last month I was at the United Nations to support the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. I also helped launch the Micah Challenge. Drawing together over 260 Christian NGOs and the more than 3 million churches of the World Evangelical Alliance, the Challenge aims to harness the political voice of all the Christian individuals they touch, to lobby for the Millennium Development Goals. What governments most need is the strong signal from their constituents that we should all ‘do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God’ in this way (Mic 6:8).

Will you encourage your people to take up the Micah Challenge? Will they share in God’s care for his children, by lobbying your government, for the sake of brothers and sisters who do not have a voice or a vote in the places which make a difference to their lives?

If only the energy we have spent arguing within the Anglican Communion had instead been used to tackle poverty, conflict, and disease! What we are doing is shameful. Over the years the Anglican Communion has had a powerful and effective advocacy role – we dare not jeopardise that. Anglican leaders must get serious, grow up, and focus on the real life and death issues of our world.

Irenaeus said that ‘the vision of God is in a human being that is fully alive.’ Ultimately, pastoral care means working for a world in which every person created in God’s image has the chance to realise fully their humanity.

To do this, we must, as Joshua was told, stand firm in the Lord. We must learn to see our world – his world – through his eyes.

Concluding Reflections

Now to my concluding reflections.

Our God is the God of reconciliation. Yet he does not impose reconciliation on us, and we cannot impose it on each other. As Robin Eames has said, from all his experience in Ireland, reconciliation comes when people want it.

Yet we must face the reality that our common life is diminished when we are apart. As the Primates said in 2000, ‘to turn away from one another would be to turn away from the cross.’ The Windsor Report adds that it would also be to turn ‘away from serving the world which God loves and for which Jesus Christ died’ (#157).

Yet we should never become disheartened by our own divisions or the divisions in the world-wide Christian community. It is God’s church – he gave us birth, he sustains our life, he will take us forward.

There are great prospects ahead of us. In 2008 we will have, in Cape Town, not only the first Lambeth Conference held outside England, but also the first Anglican Gathering for 45 years.

The Gathering of so many diverse People of God will be a glorious exploration and expression of what it means to be one in Christ. It is in the lives of faithful individuals sharing across every kind of human difference that the power of the living body of Christ will be demonstrated, in witness to the world. ‘See how these Christians love one another!’ We must not underestimate the importance of encounter – indeed, it is at the heart of the incarnation. And, as the Windsor Report says, ‘Communion is, in fact, all about mutual relationships’ – especially with those we would not normally meet.

And it will be wonderful to meet in Africa! Expectancy and excitement fill me whenever I think of it! I am already praying that all the vibrancy of life, music, worship, hospitality and friendship of our continent will infect the whole Communion, so that you never recover! What a joy it will be to welcome you in Cape Town!

‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ (Rom 8:31) Yes, no matter what challenges we face, no matter who wins the election, in Jesus Christ we have the victory!

I realise that I have frequently strayed far from my set topic in my remarks. Fascinating though these issues are, when the sheep are separated from the goats, I doubt we will be called to account over our stance on the Windsor Report. It is how we serve the people of God that will matter.

So let me end, as I began, with words from Hooker – but, more than that, words from Hooker about the centrality of Jesus Christ. In pastoral care, in every dimension of our lives, the centrality of Jesus must always be the over-riding imperative.

As we wait on him, who is the Way, he will lead us into all Truth, and in him we will find Life for all.

This is Richard Hooker’s advice to those engaged in pastoral ministry ‘If there be any feeling of Christ, and drop of heavenly dew, or any spark of God’s good Spirit within you, stir it up, be careful to build and edify, first yourselves, and then your flocks, in this most holy faith.’ (Serm. Vi.32)

Amen!