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ROWAN WILLIAMS

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# No-one can be forgotten in God's Kingdom

**The Archbishop of Canterbury gave this address at the 'Towards Effective Anglican Mission' (TEAM) Conference that took place in South Africa in March 2007, with around 400 development practitioners, clergy and lay people from 33 of the Anglican Communion's 38 provinces. Focusing first on the Old Testament's repeated admonition to 'know the Lord' and its close association with fairness for the poor, and then on the New Testament promise of becoming a renewed people of God, who gather at Christ's invitation, he reflects on the Pauline teaching 'where one suffers all suffer'. He argues that the prosperous are also deprived and dehumanised by global injustice, and concludes that one way of understanding mission is for the churches 'to make the difference that only they can make'.<sup>1</sup>**

It is an enormous pleasure and privilege to be here and I've looked forward intensely to being back in South Africa after so many years. Archbishop Njongo (to whom I once again willingly and gladly pay tribute for all the work that he's done for this conference and for many other things) mentioned earlier this morning in his superb opening address the experience that we shared at Kanuga a few years ago at a meeting on the challenges of HIV and AIDS facing this continent.<sup>2</sup> I am sure he will remember as I do one of the most arresting and challenging presentations during that meeting, from my dear friend Gideon Byamugisha from Uganda about what he was doing and what he thought the Church should be doing.

I remember the paper that he circulated – a paper in which he imagined how the history of this period might be written in fifty, a hundred years' time, a history of how the churches across the continent had combined their skills, resources and energies to confront and combat and overcome HIV and AIDS; and how without the churches this transformation in Africa's history would not have been achieved. It was an arresting, challenging moment, and I often go back to it thinking, 'how will the history of this period be written?' When people look back on this period in the life of the churches not only in Africa but across the world, and very particularly the history of the Anglican Communion, how will the history look?

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- 1 This text appears at [http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons\\_speeches/070313.htm](http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons_speeches/070313.htm).
  - 2 The 2001 meeting of the Primates of the Anglican Communion in Kanuga endorsed the convening later that year of the 'All Africa Anglican Conference on HIV and

AIDS', also held in Boksburg, and from which the TEAM Conference drew its inspiration. Archbishop Ndungane's opening address mentioned by Archbishop Williams is available at [http://www.team2007.org/pdfs/TEAMopeningaddress\\_7march2006.pdf](http://www.team2007.org/pdfs/TEAMopeningaddress_7march2006.pdf)

At the moment, it's not all that clear that the history will be precisely what Gideon would like it to be, but this week we have a chance of making our own input into history; we have a chance, I believe; a turning around of some of the perceptions that there might be of the Church preoccupied with itself. We have an opportunity of stating afresh what mission might be, what the identity of the Church might be and what its contribution might be to the real making-human of this continent and this planet. That I believe is what we're here for.

## **Knowing God and making God known in the Old Testament**

Now I want to turn to some of the biblical foundations for this. It seems to me that if we're talking about mission we must begin with the conviction about mission that it is that set of actions and habits that makes God in Jesus Christ known. Mission is about helping people to know God. 'Knowing God' is one of those phrases that crops up in a number of places in the Old Testament and so also in the first part of what I'm going to say this morning. I want to look at a number of Old Testament passages that may help us to get a grip on what it is to know God. I'm rather sorry that some modern translations of the Bible let us down here. They talk about 'acknowledging' God. That seems to me to be a much weaker word than 'knowing' God. As we all know, the verb 'knowing' in the Old Testament has a very strong sense – it's used of sexual union, the most intimate relation possible. It's a great deal more than acknowledgement. I think if we were to say that husband and wife 'acknowledged' one another in their relationship we'd be saying a little less than we ought. So I want to be very robust about the use of 'knowing' here. It means intimacy, relation, more than just an awareness of facts, and more than just acknowledgement of a state of affairs.

Now one of the things that we're sometimes told in the Old Testament, and I'll turn to some of the particular texts in a moment, is that when the people of Israel are restored, when conflicts and trials are over, then the people will 'know God'. One of the most famous passages here of course is from Jeremiah. We probably hear it read every year before Christmas:

The Lord says, 'The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah; it will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. Although I was like a husband to them, they did not keep that covenant. The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this – I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts – I will be their God and they will be my people. None of them will have to teach his fellow citizen to know the Lord, because all will know me from the least to the greatest' (Jer. 31:31-4).

## **Fairness for the poor**

What happens when Israel is restored to peace? The proper covenant relationship is that everybody instinctively knows the Lord. But what exactly does 'knowing the Lord' mean? Turn back a few chapters to Jeremiah 22:16. This is one of those passages that helps us understand why Jeremiah was not the favourite preacher

of the royal family in Jerusalem: he's comparing the present king with his father. The late king was one who did justice, who was not preoccupied with accumulating wealth, who 'gave the poor a fair trial and all went well with him' (Jer. 22:16). That is what it means to know the Lord.

That's perhaps the strongest statement that we have in Jeremiah (indeed in the whole of the Old Testament) about what this 'knowledge', this intimacy with God is all about. There's a similar passage (just to fill Jeremiah out a little further), again a matter of promise, about what's going to happen in the last days: 'I will give them the desire to know the Lord; then they will be my people, they will return to me with all their heart, I will be their God' (Jer. 24:7).

Knowing the Lord is giving the poor a fair trial. It is, as I've already said, not merely acknowledging a state of affairs, not simply being aware of a set of facts. It's not even a kind of religious awareness, a sort of inner mystical recognition that connects each individual with God. Knowing the Lord is knowing the *law* of the Lord, knowing what the Lord *requires*, knowing (and this is putting it rather boldly) how to *see* as God sees. I don't think I can put it more clearly than that – knowing how to see with God's eyes, as God sees. Not with human perceptions, the human perceptions of interest, party advantage, but to see with the eyes of a loving Creator, concerned for all of that Creator's creatures. If you want just one last reference on 'knowing the Lord', you might look at 1 Chronicles 28:9 where David exhorts his son Solomon to 'know the Lord', 'so that you will be able to do justice'. Solomon is above all the wise ruler – he knows how to do justice in God's name – of whom it might be said 'he gave the poor a fair trial', and all went well with him. That is what it means to 'know the Lord'.

Knowing the Lord is about sharing God's perspective on the world that God has made – something which we know will not happen overnight, or universally, or easily. It will only be finally realized when God has at last acted to make his presence clear on earth finally to overcome our sins and our failures, to take us finally into a new level of being. It'll happen on the far side of whatever restoration, reconciliation is going to happen for the people that God has chosen. But what that means is that when, in our present history, you can say of someone that they 'know the Lord', what's happening is an anticipation of the end of time, when real justice happens. It's a kind of foretaste of what Christians call 'the Kingdom'. More about that in a moment, but within even the Old Testament framework we can see that it is very clear that this kind of knowledge of the Lord here and now is a glimmer of God's final purpose when every person will know the Lord. There will be no need to tell of it because God's perspective will be instinctive, natural, to a redeemed people.

### **'A covenant with us all'**

Now fairness for the poor is not of course the only principle of the law of Israel in the Old Testament, but it is an essential principle. This is because the essence of the law in the Old Testament, of justice as it's conceived in that world, is that no-one is forgotten and no-one is invisible. The Law is addressed to a whole community of God's people, all of whom are taken to be responsible to God and to each other

and for each other. The idea that no-one is forgotten, no-one is invisible, runs right through the books of the law, the Torah, like a golden thread. All Israel receives and hears the law. It can be seen how this is elaborated in ancient Israel at Mount Sinai in Deuteronomy 5:3: 'the Lord our God made a covenant not only with our fathers, but with all of us who are living today'.

Those words are imagined here as being spoken by Moses to the second generation of Israelite wanderers in the desert, but we must also hear them as they would have been heard by the people of the ninth and the eighth centuries before the Christian era: 'not only with our fathers, but with all of us living today', in every generation, every member of this covenant community is the one with whom the Lord makes his promise, his alliance. The Lord requires justice from everyone. That was elaborated even further in Jewish folklore, which held that every single Jewish soul, for all generations to come, was actually present invisibly on Mount Sinai; every single Jewish soul heard the words that Moses spoke on God's behalf. Every soul, every person within this community is the object of God's commitment: that's what the covenant means. God promises to be there in intimate loving forgiving and challenging relationship with every person who belongs to this community. God promises absolute commitment to the whole community and everyone within it and therefore no-one is outside that relationship and no-one can be forgotten and no-one must be invisible. It's the principle of the law, it's the principle of the community of the covenant in the Old Testament – a covenant people.

So if fairness to the poor is part of 'knowing the Lord', if fairness to the poor is at the centre of the law itself, then having something of the perspective of God on the world that God has made is bound up with the existence in this world of a community in which no-one is invisible. And, as the revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures unfolds, you begin to see how this spills over from the chosen people to the world at large. The reality of God's commitment to this people, this community, becomes (and you see this of course especially in the second part of Isaiah) a sign of hope for the rest of the nations. It is possible even for the other nations to think of themselves in this framework; perhaps they too are the object of an eternal commitment and eternal covenant. You can't just draw a tight line around the chosen people and say 'it only applies there'. The good ruler, the good king in ancient Israel, 'knows the Lord' when he gives the poor justice.

The good king 'knows the Lord' because he's committed to sharing the Lord's perspective; and, in the Lord's perspective, no-one is superfluous, no-one is 'extra to requirements', there are no 'waste people'. Recently I was reading a book about the history of the United Society of the Propagation of the Gospel. It contained, quite properly, a chapter on the most chilling episode in the history of any mission agency, when the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in the eighteenth century received a legacy of two slave plantations in the Caribbean. And for over a hundred years it owned, operated, and managed those slave plantations. Bad enough; but if one reads some of the correspondence between the leadership of the Society in London and those managing the plantations in Barbados, one finds a discussion of what to do with 'refuse' slaves. Refuse slaves: that is, those who could no longer work. Now, the Society, being a Christian society, was disposed to be very kind-

hearted to these people. But it seems to have escaped their notice entirely that the phrase that was casually used in that correspondence, 'refuse slaves', says something about the attitude of British society and Christian society at that time to the slave system which still, for me anyway, has the power to chill the blood, because it runs so directly, so dramatically, against the grain of what the Bible is talking about. There are no 'refuse people' in this story.

But back to the king and the system of law. Law acts out the covenant, makes real, makes concrete, the commitment of God to all. Therefore when the decision makers of the society act and speak and legislate on the basis that no-one is forgotten, then there is a foretaste of God's purpose being fulfilled. Then God is known and God is made known.

## The people of God in the New Testament

Let me pass on from the Old Testament to the New. The Old Testament principles I have been outlining so far have to do not only with the management of society as it is but with a looking forward to a situation where God is manifest in all and everyone instinctively knows God. And the New Testament announces that the end of all things has come to be near at hand. What once seemed to be in the distant and unimaginable future has now become an immediate, daily, fleshly reality. God's final purpose is being uncovered through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This is, in a very important sense, already the end of the world. Where Jesus is, the final purpose of God is real, not as an idea or as an ideal, but as a human being creating community. God's final purpose is real – and that means that central to the work of Jesus is not just talking about justice but reshaping, redefining what people understand by 'the people of God'. Again and again as I read the gospels this comes across more and more clearly. Jesus is reshaping what it means to belong to the people of God. In relation to him every person can find their destiny and their freedom, particularly those who thought that they had absolutely no chance of realizing their freedom, of having a destiny under God. They are touched, welcomed, received and affirmed by Jesus as part of his new definition of the people of God.

In other words, Jesus is doing what the Law itself did; Jesus is both *saying* and *showing* that no-one is forgotten by reaching out to those who *are* forgotten, those who do not have leverage and power in their society and those who are not acceptable within the religious framework of the day. He is actively in search of those people to say 'what you thought was impossible, God has made possible: you who were once not a people are now a part of God's people', a text which echoes through other parts of the New Testament of course. Jesus is doing what the Law did. He is the one who guarantees that no-one is to be forgotten, so that the community that gathers around him – a reshaped, reinvented people of God – shows what things will be like at the end of everything. What does the end of the world look like? It looks like a community in which each is living for the good of all, in which every person is precious.

Christians ought to be interested in the end of the world. Not, I'm afraid, in the way in which some Christians have shown that interest (especially in recent centuries)

with fantasies about the apocalyptic punishment of the wicked and the reign of the just on earth, fantasies which take the most difficult parts of the most difficult book of the Bible – Revelation – and make of it a drama that comforts and excites the righteous. No – Christians ought to be interested in the end of the world because they're interested in Jesus. Jesus is where the history of the world comes to a crisis; comes to a point of finality and new decision. Where Jesus is, the future, the end is around him and, unlikely as it may sound, we who gather around Jesus are part of the end of the world. We are involved in the kingdom, that state of affairs where God's purpose and God's love determines the boundaries of human living.

Now all of that is the almost indescribably energetic, confusing, exhilarating message of the gospel. It's what seems to have been at the very core of Jesus' being and Jesus' words. It's in the light of that that he has to meet his death at the hands of an establishment who don't want the people of God redefined. It is to vindicate that that he rises from the dead, not as a solitary miracle to confound the sceptics, but as a way of continuing to call, animate and realize this community in which God's purpose is manifest. As the first generations of Christians try to make sense, very slowly and very confusedly at times, of what's happened to them, they begin to explore the nature of this community. My governing text for the second part of my reflection is therefore from 1 Corinthians 12:26: 'If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it.'

### **'If one part suffers ...'**

As St Paul reflects on the gifts of the Spirit in the Church, he's led it seems to a new and startling depth of insight. He begins by talking about how the Spirit equips each one for the good of all. It's as if, in the act of writing that out, something else dawns on him: 'if everyone exists for the good of others and gifts are given for the good of others, then everyone's deprivation, everyone's, every individual's loss is the loss of the community – there's the other side of the coin'. It's almost as if you can hear that working itself out: if any one is deprived or diminished, something is wrong with everything in the Church. So Paul, here and elsewhere in his letters, begins to feel his way into that new recognition and new realization: not only (positively) is every Christian gifted for the good of every other Christian, but (negatively) when those gifts are not somehow set free and permitted to work within the Body, then everyone is diminished. If one part suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. This is a notion that Paul applies not only within a community but also to the relationship between different communities across the developing Christian world of his day. His complex discussions in 2 Corinthians of the gift to be given to the Church in Jerusalem again stirs up the question of the relationship of different Christian communities across the globe. And Paul begins to work out how the failure to give means somebody else's inability to receive, and how that inability to receive becomes itself a deprivation of the gift they might have given.

The deep mutuality that is already implicit in the radical message of Jesus, Paul begins to work out in terms of what the Church might be. He suggests that when Christian believers try to live so as to show a community in which no-one is deprived without everyone being diminished, as that happens within history again, the knowledge of God becomes real and concrete. Not as ideas, not as just a programme

of action, but as something that deeply, fundamentally, affects everyone involved in the life of the Church. And again at this point the question might be raised, 'Isn't this only about the community of believers? Just as in the Old Testament, isn't it only about the community of Israel?'. I (and perhaps you) have heard some very interesting and sophisticated discussions of the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 which basically say 'you don't need to worry, it's only about being nice to other Christians'. I don't know why, but something in me revolts against that and instinctively thinks that has to be a shortcut. It's perfectly true that the word 'brothers' in the New Testament is normally used for fellow believers. But it seems to me that Matthew 25 is so much about relating to people whose status you *don't know* that it has to be a distortion to say that this is only about showing charity to Christians. But even if that were the case (and I don't think it is), surely what the New Testament is saying to us is, once again, 'this community is the community that knows and has heard the promise and has committed itself to living within it'. But the promise is not just for those who have heard, the promise is for those who *will hear*. The Church is not just about those who have believed, the Church is about those who don't believe, might believe, could believe, will believe. But you don't know that; you just know that they're there and the promise is for them.

### **A community of covenant and promise for the world**

All of this applies to the Church so that the Church may challenge and transform the world. I'd want to echo very enthusiastically what Archbishop Njongo reminded us about this morning, from David Bosch, about transformative mission: all of this applies to the Church so that the Church may know what it is that it offers to the world. The community of promise and covenant is here so that the world may see what covenant, law and justice are. And that suggests of course that the deprivation or diminishment of any human being (not just of a fellow Christian) is diminishment for the Christian believer because any and every human being is potentially a member of the body of Christ and so can't be forgotten, whether or not they are actually members by baptism. Everyone has that capacity and it's not for us to say 'well, it's not worth bothering with them because they'll never be part of the Body of Christ'. Leave that to God.

St Augustine of Hippo warns us in his great book on the city of God that the attempt to decide here and now who is – or who is going to be – in the city of God, the Body of Christ, is one of the biggest mistakes we can make. But, above all, that means that the Church is saying to the world, 'the form of human community that's ultimately in accord with God's purpose and God's nature is one in which these principles apply: the principle of mutual enrichment when we receive the gifts of others, and see and meet the one another's needs, and the converse, the mutual impoverishment that happens when we forget or ignore the gift or the suffering of others.' The Church says to the world, 'this is the kind of community that makes God known; one that shows God's own nature and purpose. God's nature as one who is beyond all partisanship, all self-interest, whose whole being is selflessness: that mystery which the doctrine of the Holy Trinity supremely reveals for us'.

What that leads to is that every action in which that becomes real is, to use the language of a later generation, a kind of sacrament: an effective supernatural



realization of God's nature and purpose within history. While we speak of the sacramental acts of the Church gathered for worship, I think that the Bible encourages us to believe that every action in which God's justice becomes manifest is also sacramental in the sense that it shows God's future. For us to be aware of that, to work and pray with it, is where the sacraments in the narrower sense become important. The community gathered around the Lord's Table is a sign of God's future.

### **Gathering at the Lord's Table**

The Holy Eucharist is something which Christians have often spoken of as an anticipation of the future, as the end of time present now in our midst, the Church truly being the Church. St Paul explains why that is in 1 Corinthians 11:20-22. It is the place where all gather so as to be fed, and as they gather each one is willing to give precedence to the other. If, says St Paul, you want to have the kind of party where everyone is elbowing their way towards the sandwiches and treading on other people's toes, fine, but don't try to do it in the Church. It's not that kind of assembly. This is a place where everyone is waiting on everyone else in both senses of the word: waiting, serving everyone else; waiting on everyone else. 'Are you ready, are you ready to come?' 'Is this right?' Attending to the reality of others.

Let us turn for a moment to that passage and remind ourselves of exactly what St Paul says about this attentiveness. 'When you meet together as a group it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat; for as you eat you each go ahead with your own meal. Some are hungry and others get drunk. Haven't you got your own homes in which to eat and drink or would you rather despise the Church of God and put to shame the people who are in need. What do you expect me to say to you about this? Shall I praise you? Of course I don't' (1 Cor. 11:20-22).

I love St Paul when he really loses his temper. The Lord's Table is everyone's table and when Christian believers come to the table of the Lord they come with the awareness that the need of the neighbour comes first. Therefore, as we gather, we look (literally and metaphorically) sideways as well as forwards. That is, we look to our neighbour as we gather at Christ's table, and as we see them being fed by Christ we ask 'how may I be part of Christ's feeding of them?'. And that kind of triangle seems to me to be at work in the eucharistic community, the community that gathers at the Table of the Lord. 'When you gather as a group', says St Paul, 'it's not the Lord's Supper that you eat'. When you gather just as a human group of people who happen to like each other, happen to agree with each other, happen to share the same ideals, no, that's not the Church. You gather because the Lord has invited you, and the first – the most important, often the only – thing you know about the person next to you in the Lord's Supper (I shall say this until I'm tired of hearing myself say it) is that they are *Christ's* guest. That's why there's an immediate imperative to ask of the person in the Church next to you 'well how do I join in *Christ's* nourishment of their humanity?' So, like the sacrifice it represents, the Lord's Supper is for all. It's an invitation, it's an open door into the new world.

So these seem to me to be some of the ways in which the New Testament builds on the principles of the Old, takes forward the idea of the covenant community, takes forward the idea that no-one is invisible or forgotten, says that fully to understand

this – to recognize the radical quality of it – we have to think of Jesus at the centre of it all inviting, reshaping, remoulding humanity, and Christian communities must be communities in which that kind of mutuality is always at work. We talk in the Anglican Communion quite a lot about communion, and what it means. We talk about ‘theologies of communion’, being ‘in (and out of) communion’, ‘impaired communion’ and so forth, and there’s probably no short cut in resolving the problems that are raised there. But it does seem to me that we are really cutting ourselves from our deepest roots if we can’t understand that all these things only arise and only matter because of that fundamental act of communion by which Jesus invites people to be heard, seen, welcomed, nourished at his table, in the shared act of Holy Communion.

So if the Church is doing its work, being truthful, living with integrity, it’s saying to the world ‘You can never settle down with the myth, the fantasy, that one bit of the human family can flourish at the expense of another’. That’s a fantasy. It’s a fantasy in practical terms in the long run, but more importantly a fantasy because it goes against God’s truth and God’s reality. This is not what human beings are like, this is not what human beings are made for. You can try very hard to construct a world in which people live at each others’ expense – and look at the energy we put into constructing such a world in the last few centuries – but there’s a fundamental untruth, a fundamental unreality in that. That’s what the Church has to say.

There are no ‘gated communities’ in the kingdom of God. There are no communities that are protected from involvement in the loss or the trauma of others, much as we’d like to think so. We all know what it’s like to live in an urban environment where so much of the development seems to presuppose that some people can be protected from the poverty or the need of others. We know what it’s like to live in a world where again and again we act as if there were some kind of protection for the wealthy, the resourceful, which would allow them to live with no consciousness of and no impact from the privation of others. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. It’s true of the Church, but it’s true of the Church because it’s true of humanity itself in God’s eyes.

## **Our current situation**

So in my third and final reflection let me see where we might apply some of this in our current situation. I’ve taken for granted in all this that the biblical imperative is not just a code of practice, not just a set of orders issued from on high by almighty God. The imperative comes from the revelation of God’s character and God’s will as something that is always to be seen and understood in relation to a community living in a certain way. The Bible tells us that we know God by having nurtured in us the instincts to see people and the world as God sees them and to live in a community that reflects that instinct and awareness. And the Law of the Bible is simply a way of guaranteeing that no-one is left invisible, that no-one is left unheard, forgotten.

And that doesn’t mean that God’s purpose and God’s will is just a kind of indifferent ‘yes to everybody’. Because God is the way God is, God’s holiness and justice make demands upon us requiring conversion and repentance, yes; but it still remains fundamentally the case that no-one is left invisible. And that culminates in the revelation of the new creation and the new community that is made through

Jesus' cross and resurrection. Those of you who remember the beginning, especially, of the letter to the Ephesians will know how much emphasis is laid there on the fact that now God's purpose, which has been secretly or obscurely at work through all generations, has suddenly broken through. The bird, you might say, has broken through the eggshell and is spreading its wings. This is what we're part of – knowledge of God as inseparable from the creation of a world of justice and mutual attention, mutual service and awareness of the fact that the loss of one is the loss of all.

### **Choosing to make a difference**

So, the Church today, faced with those nightmare problems and challenges that Archbishop Njongo outlined earlier, faced with Millennium Development Goals, is bound to be asking in any given situation:

- Who is being forgotten here?
- Who is not being heard?
- Who are the ones who are not reached by the Law and the Gospel?
- Whose deprivation or diminution is actually wounding us all here in this situation or that situation?

And that means positively that the Church has to be involved in creating – consistently and globally – participation and empowerment. These are, I know, jargon words, longish words for rather simple things. Let us put it in shorter words: the Church is involved in creating a place where people can make choices that make a difference to them and others. They may be very small choices, but they're real. They may be very small differences, but they're real.

And what we're celebrating in this conference is precisely the way in which the churches (in this continent and more widely) are in the business of choosing to make real if small differences. Our great temptation in a global world with sophisticated technology and rapid communication is to think that the only differences that matter are total and global, that if you can't solve the whole problem you might as well not bother about solving any of it, and if you can't save everybody, then you might as well not bother about saving anybody. We are so tempted because our minds are so seduced by the global perspective in a wrong way. But the Church, because of all I've said, has a deep commitment to the absolute significance of every moment of change, because it sees it as sacramental, as the promise of the new world.

Remember Jesus' words when the widow puts her tiny coin into the collecting box in the Temple. He says, 'she's done a great deal more than anyone else I've seen today,' and the disciples might well have asked 'How can you say that? That's not a very big difference?'. Jesus is saying, 'she's done what she could; she has made the difference she can make'. And that seems to me part of the Good News we have to share. You don't have to make *every* kind of difference, but you do have to make the difference that only *you* can make. I think that the Church's great resource here is in valuing precisely that. 'The difference only you can make', words that can be spoken to someone who apparently has very little power, very little leverage, and yet has the freedom and the dignity that God's work and God's Word assures for them.

That's why the Church is always in the business of resisting both a culture of indifference and injustice and a culture of dependency. Getting that balance right as we all know – as many of you know far better than I do – is a hard job. But those are the two enemies: the culture of indifference and injustice which says 'I can protect myself against the suffering of others' and the culture of dependency that says 'somebody else is always going to make the difference to me'. The Church can't sit down with either culture, and that's why the agenda that we're looking at in these coming days is about mobilizing those small but precious resources that we have and that nobody else has.

You've heard from others, and I've said it myself more than once in the last couple of days, that one of the points that we're celebrating here is that – not only in this continent, but certainly very visibly in this continent – the Church is probably the only organization in civil society that can deliver goals concretely at grass-roots level, in modest but real ways: whether it's the work of the Mothers' Union, which is a great sacrament worldwide (I think of the justice of God), whether it's micro credit initiatives in a village somewhere, whether it's a small school in the back of beyond like the little school that we visited meeting under a tree in southern Sudan at this time last year. All of those are examples of the real difference that no-one else can make.

The secular international NGO, subject to very clear requirements and with very large and ambitious aims, is often desperately ill-equipped to make the difference at the local level. It will alienate, it will bewilder, and it will perhaps end up not delivering even the modest change that others might. There's a role, heaven knows, for the large-scale NGO, and I'm not for a moment saying they should not exist. I have huge belief in and a passion about the work of Christian Aid and many other large agencies. Yet what we need to do is not to think that there's a solution which can be delivered top-down from large agencies and ignore the rest; nor to suppose that everything can be done by local initiative. We need to have a kind of mental and moral map in which each organization at every level simply asks 'What is it that can be done here in this way, with these people?' so as to value both the large and the small scale.

All of that local mobilizing of our human resources in counselling, in educational work, in work to raise the status of women, in advocacy for children, is inseparable from the continuing advocacy and labour at the global and governmental level. One of the jobs the Church has to do is to keep trying to bring those two into the right kind of relationship and conversation that acknowledges what can be done in one setting, what can be done in another, and gets them to work (another jargon word coming up) symbiotically – to live together.

### **Questions to the prosperous**

The other challenge that the Church needs to be making in this context, I believe, is to the prosperous societies of the West and the North in our world:

- Have you understood that you are deprived and dehumanized by a global situation of injustice?
- Have you understood that you are deprived and dehumanised by a system that tolerates the idea of superfluous people, allowed to remain invisible?

- Have you understood that it's your life we're talking about as well?

These are questions we do not hear easily or readily in the prosperous West or North, with their implication that we are victims of injustice as well, because to be a perpetrator of injustice is also to be a victim of it. We are making ourselves less human if we don't respond to God's call to meet the needs of those who suffer.

I promised you another reference to St Augustine. Here it is, again from his great work on Christian society *The City of God*, where he says that the problem of injustice is not only the suffering of the oppressed, it is the corruption of the mind and heart of the oppressor. So when St Augustine writes about tyranny, he says 'Remember part of the problem is the tyrant's soul as well as the victim's body'. That, I think, is something the Church is impelled to say to the prosperous parts of our world. It is about *our* life, because *we* are less than human while we allow *others* to be less than human. And that means that working for the Millennium Development Goals is not just working for 'the needy', 'the poor' as a separate category of human beings, 'those poor souls over there,' somehow, somewhere to whom we do good. It's working for our own healing, for the healing of all, including the healing of those who don't see the problem. That form of healing which we usually call 'conversion'.

### **'Our life and our death is with our neighbour'**

Thus we return to where we started. The Church has the mission of calling all to 'know the Lord', to announce that God has made his nature and purpose clear and that we are summoned and enabled to share his loving and creative perspective on the world he has made. We shall come to 'know God' as that perspective becomes native to us, becomes natural and instinctive to us. And we shall realize that divine perspective in a society where everyone realises the extent to which, in the words of St Anthony the desert monk, 'our life and our death is with the neighbour'. We shall realize it when we realize that the problems we confront are not their problems but ours, when we can say of the whole human race, not 'us and them' but 'we', when we can understand that we are not ourselves without them.

So our task is that of working towards a human family where no-one is forgotten. Not because of an abstract ideal of justice but because, by God's gift and by God's Spirit, we have begun, may God be praised, to 'know the Lord', and of us as a Church may it be said one day, as the histories are written, 'they gave the poor a fair trial'. That is what it means to 'know the Lord'.

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