

PUBLIC LECTURE

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CHRISTIANITY AND CONFLICT?

THE MISSION OF JESUS OF NAZARETH AND CONFLICT

I feel like an undergraduate at Cambridge who in his revision for his finals in the Old Testament concentrated on the Kings of Israel. To his surprise not a single question was asked about the Kings of Israel - but plenty on the Prophets. He attempted the first question: "*Compare and contrast the prophets Elijah and Elisha.*" He began his answer by saying, "Be it far from me to compare and contrast such great men. In all humility it is more appropriate for me to compare and contrast the Kings, Saul and David."

The title I have been given for this public lecture is "Christianity and conflict". But I don't want to begin either with Christianity, as organised religion, or with conflict. The reason for this will become clear later. So, may I be permitted to talk about **The Mission of Jesus of Nazareth and Conflict**.

The entire story of God's redemption of humanity is based on conflict on a grand scale and is reflected in a personal way. The great assurance of the Christian is the ultimate resolution of this conflict in the peace (shalom) of the final kingdom of God (Revelation. 22.2)

St Francis of Assisi's prayer sets the scene for what we as Christians want to experience in relation to the world:

Lord, make us servants of your peace:

Where there is despair, let us sow hope

Where there is darkness, let us sow light

Where there are tears, let us sow joy...

Why do I want to talk about the Mission of Jesus of Nazareth and conflict? Jesus's response is one of non-violence, but this does not mean that it is not confrontational. His truth and integrity confronts inhumanity and challenges it. Jesus' immediate followers were relentlessly persecuted for 300 years. Those who have tended to say they are following Jesus but don't follow this non-violent path are not following in the tradition of Jesus. But non-violence does not remove us from the arena of conflict.

The mission of Jesus is not ambiguous on this, but organised religion is always ambiguous because it can be a source of evil or a source for good. What always needs to be challenged is if a religion offers a vision that clearly does not take seriously the whole question of what it means to be human.

Jesus Christ told us that the two greatest commandments were 'to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength; and the second was like this, to love your neighbour as yourself. On those two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'

This is a different and radical approach to dealing with the conflicts of life. It is an approach which presents the strong foundation of love as the security against which destructive conflict cannot prevail.

However, many people see Christianity itself as being in conflict with the realities of life:

In conflict with the realities – as they see them – of secularist society or

contemporary culture; in conflict with science; with the concept of war; with issues of wealth and poverty; violence and disease; the reality of multinational power, and unjust trading practice; in conflict with the cult of celebrity. In conflict too, over relationships with other faiths; even in conflict with other Christians of a different expression of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Is he/she Catholic or Protestant?

Often the world, our society, humanity, seems to be at war with itself. How can we begin to engage with the whole world of conflict?

Firstly we must not be afraid.

Conflict is inevitable as people interact with one another. They come with different experiences, expectation and interests that have to be lived with or resolved in everyday life. The important issue is not whether or not there is conflict, but how the conflict is handled. Christians sometimes think that all conflict is to be avoided and that harmony must reign. But this is not a scriptural view; it is more of a personal subjective view born of unsatisfactory handling of conflict. Conflict is not only inevitable ; constructive conflict can be invaluable in strengthening character and deepening understanding.

Conflict exists in **group situations and institutions** where different factions have differing interests which are in deep opposition to one another. If each party fears that it may lose something that is vital to its cause in the antipathetic struggle, there is probably little room for negotiation or fair bargaining. The vexed question of ‘the just war’ – on a minor or a major scale – has its roots here.

Conflict within **communities** is a large scale reflection of interpersonal conflict. Each person has his or her own values and expectations. It may seem very threatening to be required to moderate or abandon them if they represent the

totality of the inner self. It is important that people should be operating from their own inner still centre (genuine self-possession), so that they are not easily threatened by external differences. They are then in a position to decide whether the conflictual issue is of sufficient absolute importance to take a firm stand or whether to give way graciously. (Consider John 13:3-5 where Jesus was so secure in his own identity and self-esteem born of his relationship with this father that he could do the menial task of washing the disciples' feet without losing face.)

Marriage and family life is a major arena for conflict, as people with different backgrounds, expectations and experiences try to blend together and learn how to make their needs and views known effectively. Sometimes this involves toleration of strong conflict and painful acknowledgement that some of these cherished values, views or habits need to be reviewed. Effective conflict-resolution can take place only within an atmosphere of love and trust where both parties know that there will be no winners or losers but each is respected for his or her own value. There is an opportunity for personal growth within this type of conflict. The approach to conflict which seeks to get its own way and prove the other person wrong is destructive of both parties and of the relationship. It can lead eventually to much frustration and bitterness.

Everyone experiences **interpersonal** conflict to some degree. There are two sorts of **internal conflict**.

1. The first category of **internal conflict** is caused by the imbalance between various parts of the ego structure – some parts being over-developed (eg. Conscience) and some foundational needs being unmet (eg the basic need for affirmation and approval which contribute to self-esteem and internal wholeness). Such conflict is largely resolved when some integration of the self has been achieved. Conflict which is loaded with morbid guilt usually belongs to this

category. Maturity is about relief from the sense of drivenness or imprisonment by these unmet needs, and the balance between being able to give and to receive emotionally. The sense of internal conflict can never be resolved until those legitimate love-needs have been met satisfactorily in a personal relationship of some sort. The Christian faith is addressed to this very situation, since the internal conflict is basically about the need for love, unconditional acceptance, personal value and affirmation.

The other type of internal conflict occurs in the **spiritual journey** into personal holiness, as new areas of living are discovered and the old egocentric parts of the self are gradually handed over to the love of Christ.

There is often confusion in people's minds between these two different types of conflict. For instance, when a person cannot overcome some addictive habit in spite of much wrestling in prayer and effort, it is usually because the area of struggle is in the first category of internal conflict. In a general sense, though, the first category is obviously subsumed under the second.

And what of our experience of conflict with culture?

Is it culture that is the problem?

Culture consists of the institutions, technology, art, customs and social patterns that a society evolves. Culture is the context within which every person inevitably lives his or her daily life.

The problem of 'Christ and culture' is ordinarily taken to mean that the relationship between Christians and the prevailing culture in which they live. But this obscures an important point: even when Christians reject their surrounding culture, culture itself remains the medium of their existence as they create a Christian subculture. There is no such thing as a cultureless Christianity.

There are a number of attitudes that Christians have historically taken to the question of culture:

1. The radical position is that Christ is *against* culture – with culture being viewed as hostile to Christianity in principle as well as practice. Christians may be called upon to oppose the customs and achievements of society and commitment to Christ is seen as requiring an either-or decision.
2. Christ *of* culture attitude states a fundamental harmony between Christ and culture, with Christ as the supreme hero of culture, and his life and teachings the highest human achievement.
3. Christ *above* culture affirms both Christ and culture while keeping them distinct. Christians can live with a clear conscience in both worlds, as Jesus did, while giving Christ the greater allegiance.
4. Christ and Culture in *paradox* is a position held by both the Apostle Paul and Martin Luther. This accepts the authority of both Christ and culture, and Christians live in an uneasy tension, trying to meet the demands of both and longing for an eventual salvation which will resolve the tension.
5. Christ as the *transformer* of culture is found in the tradition of Augustine and Calvin. This claims that Commitment to Christ allows a person to transform culture into a godly pursuit because Christ converts people and social institutions. Therefore Christians can carry on the work of God through their ordinary cultural activities.

How do we find our way through the maze of possibilities, of conflicts, of fears and of choices.

The answer for me is supplied by the **world view** of the Bible. And I invite you to come with me and explore its landscape.

CREATION

The picture of the world given to us by the Bible is one that sees the world in four progressive 'Frames'. In the first 'Frame' we see the **creation of the world** (Genesis 1&2). "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good". Notice also that God's creation of the world was planned for the benefit and enjoyment of God's special creation - humanity (Genesis 2: 7-8, 15-17)

For St Paul, God as the Creator of all things 'made **from one every nation** of men to live on all the face of the earth' (Acts 17:26). As a blood donor, one is aware of the way in which both the Bible and biology are agreed in affirming the universality of our creation. Blood does not change according to the colour of one's skin, nor according to nationality, faith, political stance, class, Perhaps all those who are so conscious of human conflict and difference should visit blood transfusion centres. There they will discover that all blood transfusion centres use the same standard classification of all the blood that is donated. The idea that God created all things good and that all people are made in his image and likeness is the proper answer to bigotry.

We are fellow-citizens because we are fellow-saints. As St Paul put it in Colossians 3:11, Christ has broken down all the barriers of race, culture, masculine domination and social class. This in itself is a return to the original creation when God in creating human beings said, "It is better to be God with human beings around." This view of humanity clearly shows us that the individual as an isolated person is always an abstraction. Human beings are a family. And it is in this context we must all learn to say, in the African idiom, "**I am because I participate**" **A person is a person through other persons.**

It is important to insist that what makes us human beings is more than biology. Our humanity begins there, but it is made, shaped and formed by our involvement with one another and the world around us - that is our culture.

Our cultural identity and difference must be balanced with a clear understanding of a shared humanity and membership of one world. We need other human beings to help us be human. We are made for interdependence, for complementarity. We are made for family, the human family, God's family.

If we can accept and apply this truth, then we can face conflicts which challenge us.

CORRUPTION

Our second 'Frame' of the world is its **corruption** through humanity turning its back on its Creator. For humanity to continue enjoying the benefit of God's creation it had to live in complete dependence upon its Creator; and God planned humanity's dependence to be a beautiful relationship of love between the creature and its loving Creator. Humanity rejected God's love and rebelled against its Maker's instructions.

This rebellion had two tragic consequences. First, this turning back on the Creator brought a barrier between us and God, and in spite of our spiritual hunger, we have no knowledge and experience of God until God reveals himself to us (I Corinthians 1&2)

The second consequence is that our world was brought under the control of evil and God's Kingdom of light became Satan's Kingdom of darkness - full of evil, sin, suffering, sickness and so on. For St John, "The whole world is in the power of the evil one." (I John 5:19), see also John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11); and the reason why 'the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil' (I John 3:8).

We must see it as our duty to furnish every member of this society with a clear **understanding** of what it is to be a human being, a member of the one human race, made in the image of God, and of unique worth in his sight, then this will

shape the way they see and relate to those around them. By promoting **understanding** we promote **justice**.

Our commitment as communities to promote **understanding** and **justice** will create **harmony** longed for by all.

When there is justice, the paradox is that something altogether more creative is produced than simply the absence of discrimination, disadvantage and conflict. People are set free to make their own distinctive contribution to our common life in community. The result is **harmony**, as diverse notes come together to produce a powerful and living melodious sound, not otherwise possible by any single note: be it black or white!

We need to remember, in times of conflict with our brothers and sisters, that “Our fight is not against any physical enemy: it is against organisations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against agents from the very headquarters of evil.” (Ephesians 6:12). And Satan has many disguises, appearing as the angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-15), the roaring lion (I Peter 5:8-9), the prince of the power of the air, etc, and works through cults, schisms, and occultism. We need to ask ourselves constantly the question ‘What is the power that lies behind our actions and attitudes to others?’

Nevertheless, human responsibility is independent of circumstances because we are created responsible.

That we are accountable for what we do and what we are - that, in spite of all aids or hindrances from without, each soul is the cause of its own happiness or misery - is a truth certified to us both by Nature and Revelation. Nature conveys it to us in the feeling of guilt and remorse, which implies self-condemnation. This is pictorially put for us in the Genesis 3 story of Adam and Eve.

“The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.’ Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said ‘The serpent tricked me, and I ate.’”

I know that some of us tend to dismiss this story as mumbo jumbo - a fisherman’s tale; or give it a contemporary rendition like a primary school child who listened to the story of Genesis Chapter 3 and was asked to draw the picture of the Garden of Eden.

He did this and put a big mansion in the centre of the Garden and at the bottom of the Garden a driveway. In the driveway he drew a picture of a Rolls Royce; inside it a chauffeur and two people sitting behind. The teacher asked the child the significance of the car and the people in it. “Miss,” he said, “the two people are Adam and Eve; and in the front is God, driving them out of the Garden of Eden.”

What Genesis Chapter 3 invites us to consider is the question of “**Human Responsibility, as Independent of Circumstances**”. In verse 13 we read, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat”

We are all tempted to prove our freedom, by using it without regard to the will of Him who gave it.

The original excuse offered by Adam and Eve, and indeed by all of us, after sinning, was that they were not really free, that they had acted under a constraining influence, the subtlety of the tempter. They disobeyed a command that they might be independent of their Maker; they defended it on the grounds that they were dependent upon Him. “The man said, ‘The woman whom **thou** gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.’ And the woman said, ‘The serpent which thou created, beguiled me and I did eat’ (vv 12,13)

And this has been the course of lawless pride ever since; to lead us, first, to exult in our uncontrollable liberty of will and conduct; then, when we have ruined ourselves, to plead that we are the slaves of necessity. John Milton rightly protests when he says that, “No man who knows aught, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were born free.”

We are accountable for what we are and what we do. As George Bernard Shaw put it, (Liberty) “Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.” For Kipling (in conversation with Max Aitken - Lord Beaverbrook), “Power without responsibility - the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages.”

To seek freedom, power and liberty is, therefore, to seek to embrace responsibility. For freedom, power and liberty without constraint is not creatively possible. We are all too prone to find fault with the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and this becomes our ready and familiar excuse when our conduct is found wanting.

In truth, nothing is more easy to the imagination than duty in the abstract, that is duty in name and not in reality. It is when it assumes a definite and actual shape, when it comes upon us under circumstances (and it is obvious it can come in no other way), then it is difficult and troublesome. Circumstances are the very trial of obedience.

Yet plain as this is, it is very common to fancy our particular condition peculiarly hard, and that we should be better and happier in any other. The systematic disparagement of human responsibility and the consequent substitution of outward events for the inward rule of conscience in judging conduct leads to

disastrous results - in the Genesis story this is illustrated by the loss of Paradise.

Human responsibility must be understood as independent of circumstances. To make excuses by saying 'the serpent beguiled me' or that 'my help-mate enticed me', is to belittle our Creator who made us in His image and gave us the responsibility for our lives and for His environment. The ability to accept responsibility is the measure of man and woman.

What the Genesis story invites us to consider is the truth that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty. And, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, that "you can't escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today." If people concentrated on their responsibilities, others would have their rights.

Let no-one beguile you: you are responsible to God and to each other. You are your brother's keeper. You are your sister's keeper.

RECONCILIATION

In our third 'Frame' of the world is the **reconciliation** of the world by God in his willingness to die for it and not get love squeezed out.

I have learnt that the only way I can really die to destructive attitudes in myself is by maintaining a balance between really knowing God and loving him day by day and yet knowing humanity's needs and humanity's agonies and humanity's loneliness (John 17:14-20). In practice this means that I must 'take care lest the liberty I have as a Christian somehow becomes a stumbling block to the weak' (I Corinthians 8:9); as well as realising that if I think that I am standing fast, I must 'take heed lest I fall' (I Corinthians 10:12). We must take extra care in the way in which we handle the world and the people in it.

Anger always blurs the real human features of those we're angry with. If it didn't, no-one would ever be persuaded to violent action. And so often the anger comes from the sense that I'm not being seen as a human being in the first place.

This is what happens to us when our outrage at a crime cries out for vengeance. We do not wish to see the perpetrators as human, as being someone who was a child who was not raised to be a criminal, who is even now a person loved by a parent, a brother, a sister, a partner.

And the strength of our desire for vengeance, for punishment often depends on our being able to distance ourselves from the humanity of the person who commits the crime.

Let me use the current struggle against terrorism as an example. Inevitably we are tempted to do this with those people we hold responsible for the bombings and murder in our countries. And it happens at a local level with less dramatic crimes.

But those who have written about punishment have so often said that ideally a punishment must make sense to the person being punished.

It must be recognisable as more than retaliation, within a shared frame of reference.

So the challenge before us in the law – as it is before the USA and our own country and the allies in their fight against terrorism – is what is to be done beyond punishment to make any such punishment more than revenge? The law provides the power to respond to any given crime. But how is power to be used as restoration. As a society, and indeed as a world, we are bound up together, and it's in our own interest that harmony is restored. But the hardest thing of all is to deliver **restorative justice** to the perpetrator, and at the same time stand side by

side with the victims.

People will never find their true oneness until they find their oneness in God.

A NEW WORLD

In our fourth and final 'Frame' we see a picture of a *new world* when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. This present world is temporary, it is passing away. We must not therefore get tied up with it (Galatians 6:14). Destructive attitudes are given room to grow if one forgets the transitory nature of this world.

The humanist or agnostic can be tempted into thinking that the utopian dream of a classless, culture-free society is achievable by his own militant actions and words. Overtly objectionable attitudes and actions may be overcome temporarily but only to be replaced by more subtle and pernicious ones.

Next year we will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the Slave Trade. In all that time, black people have struggled for justice, and yet they are continually frustrated. The whole enterprise feels like "making bricks without straw." Racism, racist violence and harassment, is on the increase.

I need to ask myself constantly whether my attitude to people of other ethnic groups gives glory to God; and whether my attitude hinders their relationship with their Creator and whether it hinders my relationship with my Creator.

This means that I must die to self in order to be free to allow God to control my actions and attitudes. For me the call is to reflect what heaven will be like. I must welcome the stranger, be hospitable, caring, befriending the outsider without any sense of pride or superiority. For God's kingdom is a kingdom of right relationships.

A vision is needed for the world. My ethnic origin, my tribe, my colour, my

culture, is too small to embrace humanity and the freedom God offers as his created beings. I am proud of being African, Ugandan, black, male, Christian, five foot six. But I need the rest of humanity to enrich my life.

We need to develop a world view that gives us a clear understanding of our common humanity; a citizenship that guarantees human rights and responsibility for all;

This is a world view which defines our essential relationship with God and our essential relationship with each other as human beings.

We are called to love our neighbour as ourselves? But what does it mean to understand the human value of another person.

How can we relate this, and the conflict we observe and experience, to the reality of life within our present society?

We are now living in a world in which the press, politicians and public figures are always ready to make use of the term ‘human rights’. It is invoked in encapsulating aspirations of social equality, in expressing a sense of outrage at brutality or cruelty, as well as in emphasizing the importance of the rule of law in achieving justice for individuals and marginalized groups. The proposition that human rights should be observed and respected is virtually unchallenged, but one only has to open a newspaper to see how frequently states disregard in practice even those fundamental rights which are universally recognised, whether it be in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq, or in the Detention Centres of our own countries

When will we move from aspirations, wish-lists, and declarations to a land, not “flowing with milk and honey”, but to an environment where, in the Aristotelian sense, ***“man - woman is the measure of all things.”***

A moral universe where right and wrong matter and where ultimately lies have

bitten the dust and a flowering of peace, where love and justice have pervaded that land beyond declarations, and conflict is resolved.

This kind of community will be one which is committed

- to the right to life and liberty;
- to a reasonable standard of life food, water, heating;
- to social protection in times of need;
- to freedom from discrimination
- to the highest physical and mental health
- to work, and just and favourable work conditions
- to privacy and family life
- to education and access of information
- to freedom of religion, opinion and speech
- to freedom of association
- to participation in political process
- to participation in cultural life
- to freedom from slavery and servitude
- to freedom from arbitrary arrest, torture and cruel and degrading treatment
- to protection in armed conflict
- to international protection from persecution.

Truly a land beyond declarations!

Underneath the British Home Office logo on the front page of the Human Rights Act we read the sub-heading: “Building a safe, just and tolerant society”

Safe, just and tolerant. What do we understand those words to mean? And what do we understand by the word ‘society’.

We do have a society which needs to be cared for and nurtured, but we also need to understand the nature of humanity which makes up the society in which we live. The Human Rights Act seeks to lay down in some detail not only the rights I have, because we are, but we also need to recognise that because we are never

acting alone and in isolation, we cannot avoid the responsibilities which go with those rights.

But it is instructive for us all to tackle the reality of human rights as they might begin to bite, rather than just regarding them as a general benevolent statement of good intent. It may help us to begin to look more rigorously at how we actually regard other people and how this affects the way we live with them and treat them. Human rights is based on a perception of the value of every life. And because we do not act in isolation, there is a job for all of us to do.

Human beings are of infinite worth intrinsically and human rights accrue to each one precisely and only because they are a human person. And from a religious perspective, if you treat yourself or others treat you as less than a stand-in for God, then it isn't just wrong, it isn't just evil, it isn't just painful as it frequently is for the victim: it's blasphemy, for it is like spitting in the face of God. Put less religiously, it is like spitting in the face of humanity.

And that's why we who are believers have no choice about our response, for in the face of injustice and oppression it would be to disobey God not to fight against any injustice that denies who we are.

Our cultural identity and difference must be balanced with a clear understanding of a shared humanity and membership of one world. We need other human beings to help us be human. We are made for interdependence, for complementarity.

Rights of individuals accrue to all human beings individually because these rights are intrinsic to every single human being. People like me would say the worth of each individual is infinite because each one is a God-carrier, having been created in the image of God.

R H Tawney is quoted as saying: “*The essence of all morality is this: to believe that every human being is of infinite importance, and therefore that no consideration of expediency can justify the oppression of one by another. But to believe this it is necessary to believe in God.*”

And further: “Unless a man believes in spiritual things – in God- altruism is absurd. What is the sense of it? Why should a man recognise any obligation to his neighbour, unless he believes that he has been put in the world for a special purpose and has a special work to perform in it? A man’s relations to his neighbours becomes meaningless unless there is some higher power above them both.” (p.109).

Today we possess sufficient economic, cultural, and spiritual resources to introduce a better global order, but old and new *ethnic, national, social, economic, and religious tensions* threaten the peaceful building of a better world. We have experienced greater technological progress than ever before, but we see that world-wide poverty, hunger, death of children, unemployment, misery, and the destruction of nature have not diminished but rather have increased. Many peoples are threatened with economic ruin, social disarray, political marginalisation, ecological catastrophe, and moral collapse... Mass graves in Uganda, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq.

There are clearly, even in this Third Millennium, many threats to the concept of the infinite value of every human being, and each one of us has an obligation to challenge major evils which menacingly threaten the advances of the human spirit in this new Millennium.

As Martin Luther King Jr said “*We shall have to repent in this generation, not so much for the evil deeds of the wicked people, but for the appalling silence of the good people*”.

There are many evils for us to confront; the injustice of wars, the fear of a depletion and corruption of the world’s resources, the indebtedness of the poor two-thirds world. All of these and other challenges to our common humanity and concern require radical responses which recognise the value of our brothers and sisters, and of the world with which we have been entrusted.

Once again I would urge that the Government makes good its declarations, by turning them into actions – into Acts. Mechanisms need to be created or strengthened to ensure this happens.

My plea is that we must combine justice and might, and to this end we must then make what is just strong, or what is strong just.

In my judgement liberty and equality are bad principles because they are so hide-bound by individualistic subjectivity. The only true principal for humanity is justice, inspired and nourished by love and true compassion; and justice towards the weak becomes necessarily protection or kindness. And so true peace isn’t merely the absence of tension; it’s the presence of justice.

But we must also remind ourselves that our world isn’t without corruption and sin in spite of its beauty. It isn’t at home with itself. In such a world our role is to promote understanding and thereby promote justice. Right understanding is a prerequisite for human justice.

Our commitment as communities to promote *understanding* and *justice* will create *harmony* longed for by all.

On the basis of personal experiences and the burdensome history of our planet it is clear

- that a better global order cannot be created or enforced by laws, prescriptions and conventions alone;
- that the realisation of peace, justice, and the protection of the earth depends on the insight and readiness of men and women to act justly;
- that action in favour of rights and freedoms presumes a consciousness of responsibility and duty, and that therefore both the minds and hearts of women and men must be addressed;
- that rights without morality cannot long endure, and that there will be *no better global order without a global ethic.*

By *a global ethic* we do not mean a global ideology but rather a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes. Without such a fundamental consensus on an ethic, sooner or later every community will be threatened by chaos or dictatorship, and individuals will despair.

*“We need to recognise the common conviction we have that we **all** have a responsibility for a better global order.*

- *Our involvement for the sake of human rights, freedom, justice, peace and the preservation of Earth is absolutely necessary.*
- *Our different religious and cultural traditions must not prevent our common involvement in opposing all forms of inhumanity and working for greater humanness.*
- *The principles expressed in this global ethic can be affirmed by all persons with ethical convictions, whether religiously grounded or not.*

Responsibility is both an individual duty and a demand on our communities.

As society we need to look at our organisations and our institutions, our governments and our civic bodies.

Human life, personal safety and physical security, all fundamental human rights, should be upheld in the law and practice of our institutions. This concern for humanity is also reflected in international law and human rights institutions.

The issue of Asylum Seekers is another global issue on which there is a real need to educate all communities. Because we regard all human life is sacred, the question of asylum seekers becomes a more pointed question. Our human community needs to be hospitable and compassionate to people who are, in the terms of the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees, escaping persecution. Unprecedented levels of conflict and social dislocation have caused the recent increase in the numbers of refugees across the world.

And we also want to move to a place where our responsibility for our environment arises from our concern for each other as human beings, and for our care for children who are growing into it. As Sean McDonagh says in his book *Greening the Christian Millennium* being called “to protect the very womb of life itself – the seas, rivers and oceans of our world”. (p.13) In a world where new environmental issues arise constantly from new technologies we need to be aware of the profound implications of the genetic revolution for humans and the earth in the twenty-first century and its power to initiate a new and more pernicious form of dependency between the rich powerful world in the North and the poor in the South. We must in all this face the challenging task of building a more fair, just and ecologically sustainable world.

Are these dreams or reality?

What can we find in Jesus’ Mission and his Commission to us as we look at the reality of our humanity and our conflict. Jesus’ mission is one of wholeness, forgiveness, restoration and peace. And we, as Christians, have a significant role

to play in his work..

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sets out his radical approach to the conflicts and pressures that people experience. He is looking for his followers to be agents of change in the world

1.He calls us to be people who are expectant: (5: 3, 6) Jesus is saying, Blessed are those who are full of longing for new things: they at least will not remain satisfied with the status quo or “Blessed are those who are not too proud and self-sufficient to join God’s new movement”. The second half of each beatitude carries a great promise of change.

2.He calls us to be people of Commitment (5: 8) “Blessed are the pure in heart”, or ‘single-minded’ people. The big priority for all of us is an unceasing renewal of commitment to Christ.

3.He calls us to be people of compassion (5: 7) “Blessed are the merciful” - the caring people

4.And he calls us to unassuming ways of working (5: 5) “Blessed are the meek” - gentle people. This suggests humility - but more than that. An economist once suggested that it was being proclaimed that a key principle in methods and organisations in the world was the value of smallness and the small local unit. The Church should be concerned not only with bigness.

A story is told of an eight year-old who was picking up starfish stranded when the tide went out - and throwing them back into the sea. An old fisherman came by and couldn’t understand what the little girl was doing. So he asked, “Why are you doing that?” She said, “They are stranded. If I don’t throw them back into the water they will die.”

The fisherman said, “Little girl, do you realise that the beach goes on for miles and thousands of starfish are stranded? You can’t hope to make a difference.”

Holding one starfish in her hand she said **“It makes a difference for this one.”**

And she threw it into the water.