

# Reconciliation in Time and Place

BISHOP MICHAEL DOE

**It is appropriate to end the 2005 series on Reconciliation with this short reflection, reminding us of events which happened in the course of last summer. In a world of vast economic disparities and religious hatred the quest for reconciliation is not an optional extra.**



*The Make Poverty History rally in Edinburgh*

**The Time:** July 2 2005

**The Place:** Edinburgh

The sun shone as nearly a quarter of a million of us gathered in The Meadows and walked through the streets calling on the next week's G8 Summit to *Make Poverty History*. The worldwide campaign has been unprecedented. 'Never before have so many people come together' we were told, 'fully united in demanding action to end poverty, with a roar for justice that they felt was impossible to

ignore'. The aims of the campaign have been clear: more and better Aid, the cancellation of International Debt, and Trade Justice. Only by radical action on all three fronts do we have any chance of achieving the United Nations 'Millennium Development Goals', and in particular to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and to reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five.

**The Time:** July 7 2005

**The Place:** Partnership House

It was an ordinary day in the USPG offices near Waterloo until the emergency vehicle sirens started to sound and the ambulance station across the road went into full alert. We'd started the day praying for the G8 leaders at Gleneagles, and London having just won the 2012 Olympics contributed to a feeling of

hopefulness. All that faded away as news came in of the people killed by the suicide bombers on London Transport. Staff were advised that it was safer to stay inside, until we were all forced out by a bomb warning on a bus parked just outside. Global Solidarity, Faith and Action, Sin and Death, all seemed to take on a different perspective.

**The Time: July 8, 2005**

**The Place: London**

As soon as the G8 Communiqué was published, the *Make Poverty History* coalition, of which USPG is a part, issued its response – in summary, so far so good, but much more is needed. On Aid, ‘too little, too late’: much of the promised increase is over five years and is money already pledged. By 2010 a child will still die every 3.5 seconds just because they are poor. On Debt, the Finance Ministers’ decision to cancel all multilateral loans was good, but it only releases a tenth of the estimated \$10 billion which is needed. And most disappointing, words but no promises on Trade Justice so that any real action is still left to the World Trade Organisation: no date for ending export subsidies which destroy the livelihoods of poor countries, and no commitment to let those countries protect their own economies. Some better news on HIV/AIDS, with a

commitment of treatment for everyone who requires it by 2010. But nothing on Climate Change, which is already impacting on poor countries and will seriously undermine efforts to eliminate poverty in the long term.

**The Time: Now**

**The Place: Here**

For all the seeming other-worldliness of what Advent says about future judgement and the end of all things, the central message is of the God who is here and the God who is now. In his incarnation, God is born into our time and our place, and so the death of a child through poverty becomes not a challenge to our application of the Gospel but a theological fact in its own right. The prophets tell us that judgement comes when we forsake the pursuit of justice and forget the poor. In the great Advent parable of the Sheep and the Goats Jesus reinforces that warning. As he said in the synagogue in Nazareth, the good news for the poor and the liberation of the oppressed is not for some future time but is for Now. Even in the book of Revelation, when the things of this world have passed away, there are trees alongside the river which flows through God’s new city, and their leaves are ‘for the healing of the nations’. It is for these reasons that the struggle to make poverty history must go on.