

Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane

USPG Conference

Session 1: What is Mission for Anglicans?

High Leigh, 18 June 2007

It is a great delight to be with you today. As you will see from the programme, my talk comes in two parts.

The first is entitled 'What is Mission for Anglicans?' This is perhaps more 'theological' – though don't let that put you off! It is a reflection on what Christians more generally, and what we as Anglicans, mean by mission, and why we pursue it.

The second part is entitled 'The Anglican Communion and Mission.' This address will be more practical. I shall talk about particular examples of Anglican involvement in mission, and in particular about TEAM, the Anglican Communion's International Conference 'Towards Effective Anglican Mission' that I was privileged to host at Boksburg, near Johannesburg, in March this year. My task is to remind to one another what mission is.

The Call to Mission

It has been said that 'the Church is called into being by mission for the sake of salvation'. Mission at the very heart of our vocation.

Emil Brunner put it more graphically,
'The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning.'

Always and everywhere, God calls his people to mission. Jesus' 'Great Commission' at the end of Matthew's gospel is just one instance of this.

Mission is for everyone. All the baptised are called to participate in the mission to which God summons his church.

And the definition of mission?

The catechism of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa says "the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God, and with each other, in Christ."

Further, this mission is pursued "as we pray, as we worship, as we proclaim the gospel, and as we promote justice, peace and love."

So we can say that:

- mission is prayer,
- mission is worship,
- mission is the proclamation that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who died and was raised to free us from the power of sin and death
- mission is the good news that he offers life in abundance
- mission is the bringing of the fullness of shalom peace, of love, and of justice
- mission is the building of God's kingdom, so his will may be done on earth as in heaven.

Mission is about comprehensive salvation. This was the conclusion of the distinguished South African missiologist, David Bosch, who died in a car crash in 1993, and whom I knew well.

In his highly influential book, *Transforming Mission*, he said that contemporary mission must be all-embracing.

Mission must take us beyond the false 'either/or' of vertical versus horizontal – the mistaken idea that we have to choose between preaching the salvation that brings eternal life, or working for abundant life here and now.

No, none of us has that option. All of us must do both.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, truly as one of us – human beings, made in the image of God, having both spiritual and physical needs, which our Lord desires to meet. Incarnation is at the heart of mission.

In chapter 4 of Luke's gospel we read how Jesus began his public ministry, after his time of temptation. In the synagogue in Nazareth he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'

It is as if Jesus sets out his Gospel manifesto. At the heart of his ministry is this: 'good news for the poor, for the afflicted, for the oppressed ...' This is what he also speaks of in John's Gospel, chapter 10, when he says he has come to bring life, in abundance.

We have tended to over-spiritualise these words. We should reclaim them, understanding them as applying to every dimension of human existence, spiritual and physical – an existence that Jesus dignified through his incarnation.

For God's eternal Word did not come as a philosophical concept, nor as a political programme. Nor was the Word made text. But the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

The second person of the eternal Trinity takes on the totality of what it is to be human.

Jesus' summary of the commandments in Mark's gospel, Chapter 12, gives us another way of looking at what being human means - it is to live in love with God, in heart and mind and soul and strength, and live in love with others. Therefore comprehensive mission must address us on all these levels, as individuals in community, with emotional, mental, spiritual and physical dimensions to our being.

I hope it is becoming clear to you that mission is not optional!

Furthermore, the consideration of mission is not a diversionary tactic to avoid addressing the very acute differences that we currently face within the Communion.

It is right that we should be concerned with what it means to live faithfully and obediently to our Lord, in pursuit of greater holiness and Christlikeness. But this must not be at the expense of the wholeness of God's mission in God's world.

We know that too often the world around thinks we care only about questions of sexuality.

Our engagement with mission demonstrates that this is not the case, and is tangible proof of our care, which stems from God's care, for all God's children.

I am sure that, as we live out more fully the whole breadth of what it is to be God's people in God's world, we shall better understand how to tackle the differences and divisions among us.

I am also sure that through following Jesus' example in serving the needs, the urgent needs, of others, we will be helped to know better how to follow his example in other areas of our lives.

Let me say a little more about how Jesus, and his incarnation, shape our mission.

Incarnation is a very particular instance of contextualisation – the word of God finding expression in a particular place and time and context.

Our theology of incarnation and contextualisation help us pursue the appropriate expression of the Gospel that it brings relevant, meaningful and effective mission.

They provide the basis of the strong yet supple theology of mission that we must continue to develop for the twenty-first century. Just as in the past we learnt from the development of black, liberation and feminist theology, now we need intentionally to rearticulate a development theology for today and tomorrow.

The Needs of the World

Contextual theology must relate to the circumstances which confront us – to which I now turn.

There is no doubt that the world is desperate for the healing and wholeness that only God can bring to us, in body, mind and spirit.

It is not just a matter of overall statistics on poverty, with around half the world's population living on two dollars a day or less.

Today there are, for example, 40 million people worldwide living with HIV-AIDS, of whom 3 million will die this year – and a further 4 million people will be infected. The great majority are in sub-Saharan Africa, with huge limitations on their access to health care, medication, and even adequate nutrition.

Furthermore, tuberculosis, which is entirely curable, will claim 2 million lives this year. Malaria, which is easily preventable and treatable for those with resources, will lead to more than a million deaths, 90% of these in Sub-Saharan Africa, and mostly among young children.

Scripture calls for a special burden of care for the widowed and fatherless. It is precisely these who bear the brunt of poverty across our planet.

Women are also disproportionately affected and infected by HIV-AIDS. Girls, more than boys, are excluded from even the primary education that might give them the tools to work their way out of the spiral of hardship. Orphan numbers are also rising fast – not just because of AIDS – with over 48 million orphaned children in Africa today.

This is to say nothing of the hundreds of millions who go to bed hungry, or who suffer from conflict; from famine; from drought; from floods; from cyclones, or who are otherwise excluded from the prosperity people like us largely take for granted.

Our call to mission comes, first and foremost, because we serve a God who hears the cries of the oppressed.

This is how the Lord identifies himself to Hagar in Genesis 21.

Hagar was the servant – the slave – of Abraham's wife Sarah. At Sarah's suggestion, she bore Abraham a son, Isaac. But Sarah became jealous and demanded that Abraham send them away.

Out in the wilderness, they run out of water, and Hagar cries to the Lord, believing that she and her child will die.

Scripture says 'God heard the voice of the boy'; and the angel of the Lord then says to Hagar 'Do not be afraid, because God has heard...'

God hears and God acts – and he acts through the mission of his church, by sending us where we are needed.

There are other reasons that press us towards a new urgency in mission: reasons that are encouraging.

Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have unprecedented opportunities.

It is not just the churches that have grown to understand that God's mission to God's world must be comprehensive.

Society around us has also recognised the vital importance more comprehensively integrated policies. This is the second reason for an urgent new response to the needs of the world.

We have seen the concept of the Millennium Development Goals take specific shape – a comprehensive programme for tackling every aspect of global poverty.

In 2002 the Global Fund was established, to tackle HIV-AIDS, TB and Malaria in an integrated way. Since then, it has allocated over \$7 billion to programmes in 136 countries.

Then came 2005, which was in many ways the 'year for Africa.' We saw the publication of the Commission for Africa Report; and the placing of Africa at the top of the G8 Gleneagles Summit. Africa and global poverty, were also high on the agenda of the G8 Summit in Germany earlier this month.

Faith communities, within wider civil society, must of course speak up and demand that promises made become promises kept.

And this is increasingly expected of us – and indeed has been positively encouraged by governments like the UK.

Today we have a world that has also recently come to see that faith based organisations are fundamental to the effective tackling of poverty.

This development is the third reason for a new urgency in responding to the world's needs.

Development institutions have begun to wake up to the strength of the faith communities.

James Wolfensohn, the former President of the World Bank, said the following in 2005, at his last press briefing before retiring:

I also think it is crucially important that we develop a better understanding with the faiths. People thought that was a wild idea. We have had a number of meetings on faith and development with religious leaders.

My intent is not to make the Bank a religious organization, but I think we have to recognize that faith-based organizations in some parts of the world – in Africa, for example – deliver half the education and half the health services. If you don't talk to them and you don't know what they're doing, it's impossible to have a cohesive approach.

The Commission for Africa report reached a similar conclusion.

So too have many governments and NGOs who in the past were unwilling to work with Churches or explicitly Christian or other faith-based groups.

We must not be shy of rising to this challenge. When we cooperate with aid and development agencies, we give them the opportunity to reach more people, more quickly, more efficiently. This surely is a sign of God's love in action.

The Book of Esther speaks of the opportunities that must be grasped in 'such a time as this'.

There we read how this young woman by chance finds herself in the harem of the ruler of Persia, just as a plot is hatched to eliminate her people, the Jews. Her uncle Mordechai sends her the message to grasp the opportunity that is before her: 'Who can say? Perhaps it was for just such a time as this that you came to this position?'

I am sure that we are now at 'such a time as this' – when there are unprecedented opportunities for the Church to engage in effective mission, of which we must take hold.

Hearing the Cry of the Oppressed

I have described how urgent mission arises firstly because of God's call, and secondly because of the World's needs. It arises, thirdly, because God's world cries out to him.

I have already given some of the terrifying statistics of poverty, disease, and suffering.

And I have already spoken of the God who hears the cries of the oppressed. Tackling oppression requires more than tackling the particular consequences of the way today's world works.

We need to tackle the causes.

This means looking not only at the roots of inequality and injustice within global political and economic systems.

It means looking at the deeper causes that lie within the human heart – the causes of selfishness and greed that have their roots in our fear that we will never have sufficient.

Yet God does provide for our needs. But he does not provide for our greed. God provides a world in which there actually is an abundance for us all, if only we shared it equitably.

But the whole global economic system operates through ruthless competition, based on the fallacy that actually there is shortage. And so the rich and powerful are easily able to exploit the poor and weak.

Furthermore, short term gains increasingly ignore the long term costs, for ourselves, and for future generations.

This is becoming ever more evident in relation to climate change.

Peter Selby, the Bishop of Worcester, in a House of Lords debate in October 2005, said:

We are treating the planet on which we live as a credit card with no credit limit and no repayment date.

This cannot go on.

Already we are seeing more extreme weather patterns, with more frequent and more severe droughts in much of southern and eastern Africa, and at the same time floods and cyclones.

We know that, unchecked, global warming will very quickly more than wipe out all the gains achieved by development assistance over more than fifty years.

We need to recapture the human priorities of our world, and to make clear what it means to be responsible stewards of God's creation.

We need a change of heart, a change of mind.

This is the Church's unique prophetic task.

It is for God's people to remind the world that human beings are more precious than we can ever imagine.

We are made in the image of God, which cannot be measured in monetary terms.

The world has to rediscover how quality of life matters far more than quantities of dollars.

To be civilised is not about personal or national wealth. To be civilised is to live in a world where:

'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.'

Who could disagree with this?

These words may have reminded you of verses from Matthew 25 where Jesus speaks of separating the sheep from the goats. But in fact they come from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 25 – which was first made over 50 years ago.

Yet half a century on, they remain a mocking dream for that half of the world's population who live on two dollars a day or less.

It is for us to stand up, and stand together; it is for us to declare loud and clear that we stand by these standards of justice, integrity, dignity, humanity.

And we hold everyone else to stand by them too.

We stand for equitable sharing of God's abundance, and for sustainable livelihoods for all – sustainable in environmental terms, as well as economic. This means that poorer nations must be allowed to continue developing, and richer nations must encourage this to happen, taking responsibility for their own disproportionate environmental costs.

And we stand for a global society that ensures there is adequate care for the very young, the very old, the frail, and others unable to care for themselves. Globalisation means that we are all neighbours now – whether it comes to economic systems, or climate change.

Our lives are intricately caught up with one another.

We need a new morality for our global village – one that equally values every child of God upon this planet.

It is for God's people to make this message heard loud and clear.

Conclusions

Well, I have ranged very widely in talking about the breadth of what constitutes mission, and how we might understand the nature of our call to mission in today's complex, globalising world.

Perhaps the easiest way to sum up all that I have said, is to point to the 'Five Marks of Mission in the Worldwide Anglican Communion' which were developed through the 1980s and 1990s.

The Five Marks are these:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Our task today is to apply them afresh to our own contexts. So I hope that you will recognise within them a framework that underlies all I have said so far, and that will both give shape to our discussions in the rest of this session, and provide a starting point for what we shall consider later today.