

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN AID IRELAND

**DROMANTINE CONFERENCE CENTRE, NEAR NEWRY,
CO. DOWN, NORTHERN IRELAND**

FRIDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2009

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LECTURE

“The Theological Basis for the Launch of Christian Aid’s ‘Poverty Over’”

1. Introduction

This document, ‘Poverty Over’ is, I hope, audacious. That is why I find it so attractive.

2. Where do we live?

The contemporary reality of the world is one of deep violence. The irony of the ending of the Cold War is that it has coincided with the unleashing of uncontrollable violence in many parts of the world. The combination of high technology and seemingly medieval tribal conflict has become the pattern of our times. This culture of violence manifests itself in many different ways. There is the structural violence of domineering or negligent governments in relation to their populations. Corruption and the abuse of power often manifest themselves in violence. In addition, there are often structural forms of traditional violence, mainly based in patriarchal societies. These result in gender discrimination, forced labour migration, discrimination against young people and those with disabilities, and discrimination based on race, caste, and class. Surrounding our very life is the violence against the environment.

Against this rather gloomy picture, positive signs must also be noted. There is a yearning among young people for true manifestations of peace and of peaceful communities. In the aftermath of the Tsunami we have observed remarkable efforts to create communities of peace in various places. Again, the speed of reconciliation after ethnic and communal violence often has been very rapid. Despite violence, there is evidence of a vast amount of resilience among populations who have been deeply wounded.

In 2001 and 2002, I visited Halmahera in the North Moluccas, in Indonesia, where I had served for 13 years in the 1970s and 1980s, and saw the results of the Christian – Muslim violence, which had been stimulated by the political situation in Indonesia at that time, and aggravated by elements within the Indonesian military. Events too terrible for words had occurred. Both Muslims and Christians were involved in violence. Let me just give one example. Six of my former students in Indonesia, all

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ordained pastors, were killed. One of them was the Rev Albert Lahi. He was in the vestry of his parish church when elements of the *Jihad*, aided and abetted by elements of the military, arrived. He knew that his case was hopeless. He asked to be allowed to pray. His wish was granted. He put on his preaching gown and knelt by the communion table. He prayed for his church, for his nation, for his congregation and for those about to kill him. The Sunday School children who observed the whole incident told me what happened. Then he stretched his head forward and was beheaded. His head was carried on a pole around the village. His body was dragged by the feet for all to see. Yet in this same village, and in this whole area, reconciliation has come about. Christians too, were heavily engaged in violence. However, since 2002 both the Muslim and the Christian populations have been slowly but surely working their futures out together, in a quite remarkable display of creating communities of peace.

3. Who are we as Christians?

We are the ones who bear the name of Christ upon ourselves. I speak as a Christian theologian. Who are we Christians? In theological terms, it is not precise to speak of our faith as “Christianity”, as if it were some sort of ideology competing with other ideologies in the marketplace of ideas. Rather, we are the ones who bear the mark of Christ upon ourselves, symbolically on our foreheads, as it were ². In Rowan Williams’ words, “(w)e carry the name of Christ. We are the people who are known for their loyalty to, their affiliation with, the historical person who was given the title of ‘anointed monarch’ by his followers – Jesus, the Jew of Nazareth” ³. Our identity is not, first and foremost, as those who promote a particular ideology. Rather, it is as those who bear witness to God’s action upon and within our personal and communal lives. We simply identify ourselves with the particular action of God in history. In God’s interaction with Israel and then, particularly, with God’s interaction with humanity in and through Jesus Christ. We bear that name upon ourselves. We are adopted into that framework. In all our activities, the living Jesus and the presence of God’s Spirit is there. It is just who we are. Or rather, whose we are. It is this that gives us security and hope and meaning. Nothing else. Mercy is to be seen as central to human existence. The greatest struggle which the early church had with the pantheon of Greek gods was with the god of healing, Aesculapius, at Epidaurus in the Peloponnese. Here the commercial nature of medicine was finally overcome by the merciful communal understanding of healing. Medicine was not merely to be a transaction of a commercial nature between doctor and the one seeking a medical procedure. The interaction was to be one which involved the community as well as the patient, and one where mercy was to be paramount.

4. Where did we come from? Some history.

The church got enormous involvement in community services. However, that does not mean that it took on everything and anything. It made clear its own view on community services.

A particular Christian view of medical ethics, for example, fought in the 2nd Century with Greek Views and became the dominant view within Western Culture. The view that medical ethics should be not simply commercial, but related to wider morality, became the dominant view, but is now under

² See WILLIAMS, R. “Christian Identity and Religious Plurality”, in *Current Dialogue* 47 (2006), pp. 6 – 10.

³ WILLIAMS, p. 6.

question or challenge. Aesculapius at Epidaurus. Nature of the interaction of doctor and patient. God of healing. Commercial. Early church – healing communal, non-commercial, for the common good and involving all parties. Dr has a responsibility to care for you. Not allowed to kill.

5. How do we know what to do?

How do we listen to the voice of God? It is not our task as Christians primarily to invoke God for our particular view of the world, but rather, in humility, to sit and listen as that divine voice comes to us. Therefore, we need to take up this task theologically.

6. Where do we go?

Let us first go to the very heart of our existence as Christians, and as the church. The inexplicable will of God to be for, and with, humanity implies that the church's life cannot begin to be understood in terms of the structures and events of the world. Equally, God's inexplicable will to be God with, and for, humanity implies that we should always understand our life as Christians theologically. These simple, yet profound, facts derive from the mystery of the triune God not to be God apart from, or separate from, humanity, but rather to make God's very life intersect with the unity of the Son of God with us. Our theological basis as Christians and as the church is in the wonder of God's condescension, in the intentionality of God's solidarity with sinners, that is, with those who find their self-identity solely within themselves, and find their self-justification and sole solace in themselves alone, without any reference to God. The church is called to exist solely through the solidarity of Jesus Christ with those who are alienated from God, by Christ going to the extremes of alienation for humanity, so that humanity might through him come close to God. At the heart of our faith is expressed the fact that God does not wish to be alone in celebrating the wonder God's inexpressible love for humanity. God in Christ calls into existence an earthly body of his Son, who is its heavenly head, in order that humanity may responsively rejoice with God in the harmony and peace which God has established for creation.

If the being of the church and its life is predicated upon the grace of Jesus Christ as itself defining God's action in the world for the reconciliation of creation, including humanity, then its life of peace is that which it receives from him, who is its life. The church's very existence will be shaped by the manner in which it confesses this truth to be its very life.

On the basis of our theological identity in Christ, we as Christians must take the writings of the Old and New Testament most seriously. God has much to say about many things. However, as we know from *The Poverty and Justice Bible*, recently produced, God has a very great deal to say about **poverty and justice**. I wish to look at a number of passages, but first I want to look at methodology.

7. How do we go for help? How do we use the Bible?

For Christianity the issues of **the primary** and **the secondary** are central, as they are in the traditions of Judaism. The primary in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is the worship and service of God. The secondary are all those arts and skills necessary for human life, both individual and communal, that is, the arts and skills of the doctor, the businessperson, the accountant, the engineer, the

builder, the statesman, the artist, and so on. In and of themselves, these arts and skills are important, indeed essential for human life, both individual and communal. However, these secondary abilities can never become primary in human life. Any attempt to make them so is idolatrous. This essential distinction underlies the Judaeo-Christian theological tradition. It must constantly be borne in mind. In our society today we are very good at the secondary. However, we have forgotten the primary. That is where we as Christian leaders come in. We are the glue of society. We are called to provide meaning for our society. We promote the primary. We must never forget that.

8. So what do we see in Scripture?

I wish to look at a number of passages.

First, I begin with Mark 10: 17 – 27 (The Rich Young Ruler). This reads as follows (NRSV)(from verse 21): ‘(21) Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ (22) When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (23) Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ (24) And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! (25) It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God’. (26) They were greatly astounded and said to one another, ‘Then who can be saved?’ (27) Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible’. This passage gives us a clear clue. Its point is that, from a human point of view, poverty will never be overcome. However, it is also saying that the expression of the very essence of Christianity is that poverty should be overcome. How are we to interpret this passage? Are we to modify it? To tone it down? To try a few dodgy tricks with the exegesis? There are a few ways that you can do it. Let me show you. One is that you can say that in verse 25 it is not κάμηλον (ος) (*camel*) but κάμιλον (ος) (*rope*)(miniscule variation f13 – 11th. 15th. century). Another you can try to allege that there was a gate in Jerusalem called “The Eye of a Needle”. Neither work. Then, are you forced, like Albert Schweitzer, to say that this passage, like the Sermon on the Mount, is so impossible to fulfil that you are driven to despair, and fall, as it were, on you knees before Christ and ask for mercy in repentance? In fact, we are faced with the reality of Christ’s word here. We are called to repentance. However, we are also shown that there is another way, that is, that fundamentally Christianity is counter-culture and counter all of narrow societal self-preserving constructs.

Second, we need to look at Luke 15: 11 – 32 (The Prodigal Son).

The account of the Prodigal Son only occurs in Luke. It must be seen clearly within its own context. That is set out in the first three verses of our reading.

Because Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners, and the Scribes and Pharisees are grumbling about that. When Jesus eats with outcasts, it is not just humanitarian broadmindedness, or a cavalier disregard for religious laws. It is God breaking through God’s own traditions in order to reach out and save those who have broken them. Jesus takes his place alongside sinners in the place that they are, in order that they might come close to God. Then Jesus tells three parables. The first is about the lost sheep versus three (3) to seven (7). The second about the lost coin, versus eight (8) to ten (10) and

then the third parables, our a parable, the Prodigal Son versus 11-32. A number of issues need to be born in mind.

First, the issue of what a parable is. A parable as we know from Mark, 4:10-12 is a story about the nature of God, which radically confronts you and has the effect of changing your whole outlook on life. In John's gospel, it is the "I am" sayings of Jesus like "I am the way the truth and the life" which confront you and change you. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, it is the parables. So this prodigal son story is going to confront us and change us.

Second, we need to look at the background to this prodigal son story. It is primarily about the extravagant love and grace of God towards us. The father in the story is excessively extravagant toward his younger son, bordering on being imprudent and foolish according to the apocrypha book Ecclesiasticus, or, the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach 33: 19-23. The apocrypha is made up of the later writings at the end of the Old Testament period, which do not have the theological and authoritative status for the church of the books of the Old Testament. However, they are of vital importance in understanding the world of the Old Testament. In Ecclesiasticus it says a father should not give inheritance to the son before his death, from which we, in modern times, gain our understanding of inheritance and the preparation of wills.

He doesn't just give his inheritance to his first son, the natural heir, he is so extravagantly generous as to give it to his second son. This second son goes out to a foreign country and wastes his money. Pigs were especially shameful and unclean according to Leviticus 11: 7-8.

The father's compassion is overwhelming. He runs to the second son before he has made his confession. He runs out to meet him. He gives him a ring, a sign of authority. He is then confronted by the angry elder son. He holds the high moral ground of obeying the law. He doesn't even call him brother, but this son of yours. But the father says: "your brother". But the father has not deprived him of any right, nor deprived him of any love. It is simply that the father's compassion is overwhelming towards the lost. In Christian theology, and especially in the Protestant tradition, this has been a very important parable and it has three major teachings.

First, it speaks of the unrestricted grace and love of God towards humanity and especially towards those who are outcasts. In this, theology has seen the elder brother as the Jew and the younger brother as the Gentile. The message of Christ is the overwhelming love for the outsider. For the despised and for the rejected. This kind of theology has very heavily influenced the Uniting Church in its relationship to government through its community services work. It has also caused the Uniting Church internal theological struggles about those members who some people would consider to be outcasts within our midst.

The **second** point began in the interpretation of Martin Luther and has been important in theology both in Calvin and in Wesley and subsequently. Luther uses the phrase *simul justus et peccator*, which means at the same time justified and a sinner. Luther also uses another line that all people must be damned before they are a saved. What Luther means by this is that unless we are like the prodigal, we

cannot be saved. Because we, if we are like the elder brother, have no need of God. We have to feel completely abandoned and then we are loved and forgiven. The phrase is often expressed in the hymn “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to they cross I cling.”

Third, Karl Barth takes this to the further theological point, based on Luther and Calvin, in Church Dogmatics 4/1, 59.1 entitled “The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country”. What Barth says here is that Jesus became the prodigal for us. In the Incarnation, he comes into the far country of our lives. This world is the far country for God, our world of sin. Jesus comes into the far country and then returns to the father. He, although a Jew, chooses to be a Gentile as the beginning of this passage says – he eats with publicans and sinners. He chooses to be irreligious and to associate with the wrong people – with unclean pigs. We are the unclean pigs with whom Jesus associates. He chooses to be the Second Son although he is actually the First Son. He is truly human. He then returns to the Father. And we, in him, are brought back to the Father. We return to the Father. So, this act of grace on behalf of the Father towards us is only possible if we see our need for grace and also realise that our need for grace only comes in Christ. The parable shows that Jesus entire ministry was tied up with his crucifixion. This leads onto our final conclusion.

The church is the body that lives in rejoicing. It is the body that lives in rejoicing just as the father has prepared a banquet for the prodigal son. A kind of infectious joy, for all people. Because it is the joy of those who have been saved that do not deserve to be saved. It is not judgemental, but a body that gives hope. It therefore lives out what Paul speaks about in 2 Cor 5:16-21. The Church is a body of reconciliation, where those who have been enemies, become friends and part of the one body. We need to work against poverty. Where all these prodigals coming home can not behave as if they are the elder brother. Moreover, we are ambassadors for Christ and are therefore called in a new humanity to speak only of the joy of love in these circumstances.

Third, we need to look in detail at Romans 12. A microcosm of the New Testament understanding of building communities of peace for all can be seen in the ethical sections of Paul’s writings, especially in those ethical sections in his *Letter to the Romans*. It is arguable that no document in Christian history has played a more influential part than Paul’s *Letter to the Romans*. One simply has to reflect on the pivotal impact of *Romans* on Augustine and the development of Western Christianity, on Luther and then on Calvin and Cranmer and the political, social, and religious consequences of the Reformation, on Wesley and the emergence of the Evangelical Revival, on Karl Barth and his dominance of Twentieth Century Theology, and on the Second Vatican Council and the Renewal of the Roman Catholic Church. A primary impetus for Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Wesley, Barth, and the Members of Vatican II came from Paul’s writings, particularly from *Romans*. This letter is thus central to Christian self-identity and self-understanding. It forms a useful basis for the exploration of the understanding of Christian community based on identification with God in Christ, as it challenges the prevailing Greco-Roman culture of status based on potentially violent concepts through the ethical sections of *Romans*, particularly in Chapter 12. We need to understand that it both reacts against, and transforms, Graeco-Roman cultures of the first century C E. We need, first, of

course to look at the results of socio-scientific research on first century C E social organisation, on social interaction, and on religious organisations.

Christianity grew out of a situation of oppression, a despised minority of a despised minority. We look at the struggle Christianity to create communities of peace in this world of violence. We look, initially, at the world into which it was born.

First, in the world of Early Christianity, social groupings were based on kinship, ethnic issues, power, and politics. Kinship was the central factor of social organisation. The kinship group was the focus of individual loyalty, and had decisive influence over individual identity and self-awareness. Hence, the most basic unit of social awareness was not the individual. Individual consciousness was subordinate to social consciousness.⁴

Second, religion, like other social factors, was enmeshed in kinship and politics. Membership of a religious community was not necessarily based on religious relationships, but on bonds of kinship that gave structure to religious associations. Membership in religious groups was either involuntary or voluntary. In the first century C. E. the religion of voluntary members resulted in a newly-created kinship group.⁵ Although it appeared to be similar to, or to look like, any other kinship group, it was in fact a created or fictive kinship grouping. In early Christianity, language of the natural kinship group, for example “household (of faith)”, was used for a created kinship group.

Third, there is considerable evidence in the First Century C. E. within Greco-Roman culture of intense expressions of emotion, through outbursts of anger, aggression, pugnacity, and indeed violence. Moreover, these appear to have been socially acceptable.⁶

Fourth, in such an atmosphere, concern for honour and shame was significant. This was because honour determined social standing and was essential for social cooperation. Honour was the outward approval given to a group or an individual by others whose honour was not in question. A person’s sense of self-worth was therefore established by public reputation related to that person’s associations rather than by a judgment of conscience.⁷

⁴ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983): 90-91. Cf. Gerd Theissen, *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics and the World of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1992): 272 – 278.

⁵ Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, edited and translated by John H Schutz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982): 27-40. Cf. Philip F. Esler, *The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific approaches to New Testament interpretation* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1994): 6 – 12.

⁶ L. Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford: University Press, 1973): 193; A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Reason for Romans (Studies of the New Testament and its World)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988): 81-83. Cf. William R. G. Loader, *Jesus’ Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002): 177.

⁷ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981): 27-48.

Over against these four factors of community life in the Greco-Roman cultures of the first century C. E., Paul summons Christians to a new form of religious organisation, a fictive kinship religious community based on identity in Christ in which membership is voluntary, and also to new social roles. These social roles are based on the twin concepts of peace or harmony, and mercy, in a complex of cultures where expressions of violence seem not only to have been common, but also accepted, as has been noted. Paul also summons Christians to base their ethical lives on *the primary*, over against *the secondary*, which includes distinction of race, class, culture perspective and political outlook.

To understand the significance of peace or harmony, and the related concept of mercy, in Paul's writings, it is helpful first to look more widely in the New Testament at the Greek words commonly translated *peace* and *mercy*. There are strong communal elements in the New Testament uses of *peace* and of *mercy*. There are also strong elements of God's desire for a world which ultimately is to be under God's rule. These factors can be seen as the two concepts are examined more closely.

The Greek word "εἰρήνη" (*eirēnē*) means *harmony* and *peace*. The verb "εἰρηνεύω" (*eirēneuō*) signifies *to be at peace* or *to live at peace* or *to keep the peace*. *Eirēnē* is also closely associated with the Hebrew term for *peace* and *harmony*, "שָׁלוֹם" (*shālôm*). In the New Testament, *eirēnē* refers to two distinct states of peace.

First, it means the final salvation and harmony of the whole community, and thus of the whole of each individual person. The Angels' Song in Luke 2: 14 refers to this salvation and harmony which has come to the earth. It is this idea of peace which Paul himself uses in II Corinthians 5: 16 – 19. There he speaks about Christian believers, being justified by grace in faith, having peace and salvation with God through Christ. So the concept has a future orientation, referring to the final end of history.

Second, on the basis of its future orientation, *eirēnē* refers to a condition here and now of peace and harmony, guaranteed by what will occur at the end of time. This divinely-willed state includes Christians' wellbeing, and also their harmony with God, with one another and with all human beings. Paul uses it in Ephesians 4: 1 – 3. So, again, the concept has also a present orientation. This present orientation refers in the first instance to the state of the whole community, and then to the individual as part of it.

The First Century C. E. Greek terms for *mercy* are "οἰκτιρμός" (*oiktirmos*) and "ἔλεος" (*eleos*). Both refer to *mercy* and *compassion*, while *oiktirmos* additionally means *pity*. The verbs "ἐλεέω" (*eleeō*) and "ἐλεάω" (*eleaō*) mean *to show kindness* or *to be merciful*. Human mercy, therefore, denotes the divinely intended attitude of Christians towards others. It signifies sympathy and loving-kindness, which are to be exhibited in relationships, particularly through acts of help to the needy. This we see in Matthew 9: 13, in relation to Jesus' attitude to eating with outsiders, and in Luke 10: 37, in relation to Jesus defining the neighbour who may be an outsider. The neighbour was indeed none other than the despised outsider who showed mercy to the person on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among thieves. Thus, in the definitions of both of these terms as they were used in the New

Testament, we see sustained communal elements, and also sustained pointers to the ideal of a society which is ultimately to be under God's rule. Again, the factors of *peace* and *mercy* have their bases in *the primary*, rather than *the secondary*, as noted above. So, if we now return *Romans*, we can observe how he deals with the four factors of community life in Greco-Roman culture outlined above.

Over against the four factors, Paul summons Christians to new social roles. They are based on mercy, peaceable conduct and reconciliation in a culture where expressions of violence seem to have been normative. The call for transformation now means new expressions of group identity. No longer based on kinship or ethnicity, group identity nevertheless seeks to retain the intense cohesion of former groups. Paul's community members bind themselves together as one body in Christ. This metaphor is poignantly suitable in a society where self-awareness arises from group association rather than from individual worth. The ideals of honourable and shameless conduct are altered in that they are not primarily derived from society outside. Rather, enhanced honour for the community derives from its incorporation into its risen Lord. For that reason, attitudes of peaceful harmony are central to the community's identity. Again, once more, it can be observed that the basis of individual and especially communal life is to be related to *the primary*, rather than *the secondary*.

However, for Christianity, there is another factor of very considerable significance. Throughout *Romans*, attitudes to those *outside* the newly created Christian social groupings are to be the same as to those *within* them. There is to be no distinction. All are to be treated in the same way.

Present-day individualism makes it difficult for us to see the significance of the dynamism of Paul's total transformation of a received aggressive culture. Moreover, throughout world history Christianity has had both success and failure in being able to present and live out this newly transformed identity in Christ.

The social groupings see their identity as coming from beyond themselves. Their self-understanding and their life together are defined by the kindness or mercy of God and by the truthful harmony (or peace) which God gives. The other factors in the transformation include cohesiveness within the group based on an understanding of God's action from outside. For that reason, attitudes of peaceful harmony are central to the community's identity. Moreover, no other identity marker (ethnicity, gender, class, or status) may be accepted as absolute. Honour derives from the faith-life of the community, originating from beyond. The original groupings are transformed by the new ideal of a central awareness of their relationship with God. Our identity as Christians is based on being a new creation and a reconciled community. For the same reason, the existence of poverty is scandalous.

9. So what can we learn?

There has been a strong anti-Erastian element in the Christian tradition, which governments from time to time have accused of itself being a desire for theocracy. It may have been misused in the past, but it is a service which the church must offer to the state. "Need in a society may be due, not to lack of social services, but to something fundamentally wrong with the society itself. The social and political structure may need radical reformation which the community is incapable itself of carrying out. The

Christians and the Christian Church in such a society may believe themselves called, unpopular though it is, openly to criticise the whole political or social structure”⁸

Where is *our world today*? Where is our future? The central problem of western society in a country like Australia is that we live in a world of **sophisticated despair**. Moreover this sophisticated despair is also **silent**. We live in a world, in this society of ours, where there is a great deal of affluence (although not universally so). However, vast numbers of people have **no meaning in life**. The outward and physical forms of a happy life are there. And yet there is no meaning. We as Christians are certainly those who should **provide meaning**. Many people are very well educated and have the trappings of a middle class life, but have **no central meaning**. The primary calling of Christians in this state and in this city is to provide meaning for lives of meaninglessness, emptiness and despair, however sophisticated it is. This meaninglessness and despair is not related to physical poverty, but to the poverty of the heart. It is our primary job to address that, and not to mimic the sophisticated despair of much of society.

10. What are we to do?

We can see that in **four pictures** which the Apostle Paul uses for the church:

1. Ekklesia – Pilgrim People – from Exodus

This is a picture of the people of God as those who are liberated from slavery, that is, from their slavery in Egypt. The Israelites escape from Egypt, journey through the wilderness, and arrive in the Promised Land. It is a picture of a Pilgrim People constantly guided forward by God. So you and I are constantly to be guided forward by God into new ways of being Christian and into new ways of creating harmony in this state.

2. Temple of the Holy Spirit

This picture comes from the worshipping traditions of Israel, and from the criticism by the Dead Sea Scrolls Community at Qumran, that the Temple in Jerusalem was spiritually dead. The concept is of the Holy Spirit reviving the Temple and thus, for us, the church. New means of being Christian and of involvement with society in thought and in deed have always to be sought by us as Christians.

3. Bride of Christ – Hosea – Gomer

The picture of the bride of Christ comes from the prophetic traditions of the Old Testament, and Paul uses it here. Christ is the bridegroom, and the church is the bride. The prophet Hosea was married to Gomer. Hosea loved Gomer, but Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea. She went off with other men. It was Hosea’s right, indeed his duty, to dismiss Gomer from his household. But Hosea would not do that. The more she betrayed him, the more he loved her. So it is with Christ and the church. The more we go after other gods, the more Christ loves us. So we are the ones who are loved, rather than the ones who love. There is no greater

⁸ J. L. M. Haire, “Diakonia in the Reformed Churches Today”, in James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker, eds., *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on his Eightieth Birthday*. London: Epworth Press, 1966, 179 -180; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/3: 2* (English Translation). Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1961, 892.

witness in the world than for us to show that we are the ones who are loved in this world. Nothing in mission is more attractive to the world.

4. Body of Christ

This picture means that the church has its identity only in Christ. We Christians do not replace Christ. Nor are we simply a group of Christian enthusiasts. Rather our identity is in Christ and our meaning in this world is in Christ, whether we celebrate it in the Lord's Supper or in the Christian community or towards society as a whole.

It should be **these pictures** from Paul which drive us on as Christian leaders. These things are what we are called to proclaim in the world today.

We thus see the radical way in which Paul took hold of Graeco-Roman categories of group identity, and then applied to them new metaphors, including that of the body of Christ, so as to create in them a totally new identity. Present-day individualism makes it difficult for us to see the significance of the dynamism of Paul's transformation of a received aggressive culture. Moreover, throughout world history Christianity has had both success and failure in being able to present and live out this newly transformed identity in Christ.

We need here to look at the **Ethical Framework**. We need to see which ethical framework we are dealing with;

- (a) **Consequential** – the greatest good for the most people – “the dictatorship of the majority” – the world of politics.
- (b) **Deontological** – what is laid down in law or duty.
- (c) **Perfectionist** – the world of theology, and educational psychology

That identity drives our concern for community services. It is very important for us to realise this. We humbly offer what we are and have, nothing more. What happens then, when life is not so favourable to Christianity, as it is not at the moment, in the West? It is significant that in the prosperous West Christianity is not growing. However, in the poor South it is growing. Moreover, whose is the money? Does it belong to a local church? Or a national Church? Or the Church universal? In other parts of the world, of course, say the third world, conditions are favourable for the flourishing of Christianity. In our situation, Christianity could use our community service work as a security blanket. So we could say, look, our numbers in our congregations are declining, but we've got our logo all over the place, so all is well. That would be a false motivation. It would deny our real Christian security, which is found in Christ alone. A more faithful way is to say we will continue to proclaim the gospel as we always did, but we will also engage in community services as a way of proclaiming and living our the gospel and because Christ has commanded us to do so anyway.

A significant example of this comes from eastern Indonesia. This was in the issue of ecology and the integrity of creation. In the 1980s, during the logging boom in the eastern Indonesian islands, a licence was granted to an overseas company to log in an area of high density timber of the highest

international value and uniqueness. The concession set out terms for the logging; only one tree in ten was to be felled, and that tree was to be replaced through planting. The villagers, mainly Christian, saw that the terms of the licence were not being carried out. Moreover, they saw great danger in any logging of this proposed scale taking place in any case. In fact, their overwhelming outlook was controlled by their concept of salvation, both present-orientated and eschatologically-orientated. They regarded the overseas logging company as merely irresponsible children, as endangering the integrity of creation and especially as being unfaithful to their concept of salvation. The villagers were humanly powerless, but divinely empowered, in their eyes. Thus, in darkness, day-by-day, and week-by-week, they removed small parts of the logging machinery and hid them in the forest. The logging company brought in more and more equipment, with great trouble and at great expense. The villagers continued to remove and hide the small parts. The logging company was greatly frustrated, but could not work out how the parts of their equipment were disappearing. Finally, the logging company gave up, returned the licence to the government, and left the area. No more logging took place. After this, the deeply pious villagers gave thanks to God for God's guidance and empowerment. They had absolutely no concept of carrying out sabotage, or of acting illegally. For them, it was clear simply that irresponsible outsiders, like irresponsible children, were engaging in activity that was, and would be, detrimental to both present-orientated salvation and eschatologically-orientated salvation. They carried out, in their perspective, a theological *praxis* of salvation.

We in our time live in a deeply ambivalent age, an age of high technology and of medieval conflict, and an age as strangely confident of the saving powers of the market-place as a previous age was strangely confident of the saving powers of collectivism. Yet both these ages have reflected inbuilt cultures of violence. In this age, Christians are called to follow Paul in speaking of, and living out, the wonder of God's mercy, peaceful harmony and reconciliation with humanity. Christians are thus called to a life of praise, which embraces all of our personal and social life, in all its practical, ethical, religious, political and intellectual aspects. That praise will be both culture-transforming and culture-renewing, over against the self-worship of individuals and nations in our time.

This vision of Christian community is eschatological in nature. It pictures the end of time as now already beginning to be operative

One of the great leaders of the Christian ecumenical movement, Archbishop William Temple, served as Archbishop of Canterbury for only two years, from 1942 to 1944. One of his lasting images to the ecumenical movement was that of the Christian with bi-focal lenses. In his writing he says that we should look through the top part of our glasses to see the world as God intends it to be, united and in harmony. With the bottom of our lenses we see the world as it actually is, divided. Although we look at life day-by-day with the bottom part of our spectacles, we should also always live as if the top part were reality, as if there was true harmony in the world. So it is with spirituality, culture and community. With the top part of our spectacles, as it were, we see a world community of peace and harmony. With the lower part of our spectacles, we observe the world as it is. Although we daily look at reality through the lower part, we must live as if the upper part is reality too.