

## Olivier Memorial Peace Lecture 2015

Rowan Williams

### Conflict, peace and justice

Rowan Williams used his lecture to give a view, necessarily selective, of conflict and peace in our day. His key message was the need to recognise that human beings are interdependent, as are states. We need to recognise, foster, and celebrate that interdependence in order to live in peace and justice.

To summarise:

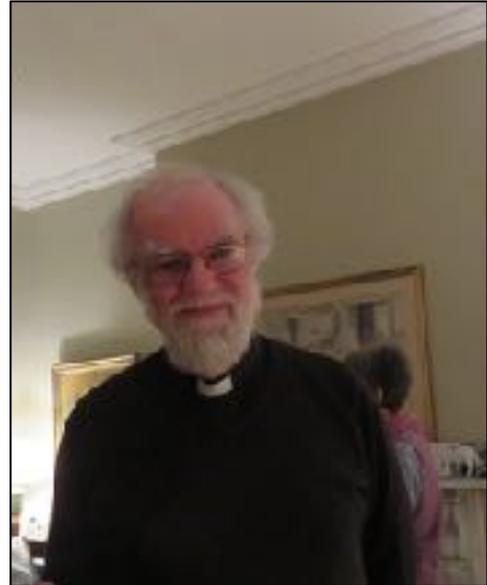
#### *Conflict*

What is the nature of conflict? How can we deal with it?

There is a body of Christian thought about conditions under which it is just to go to war. Just-war theories derive from the ideas of people such as Augustine and Aquinas who were making sense of the conflicts in their own day. Augustine in the 5th century was considering how the use of force in the face of external threat could be compatible with Christian discipleship and what limits should be put on it. Aquinas in the 13th century was thinking about how to limit the damage that rival small states inflicted on each other. Both were thinking pragmatically, not setting out to create a theory. Their reflections were later expanded to apply to new circumstances.

We are now in quite different circumstances from Augustine and Aquinas. The challenge now is to grasp how to deal with new kinds of war in which the categories used previously no longer apply. Ideas about war as self-defence or changing the balance of power are outdated. Mary Kaldor has spoken of 'new wars' and shown that in wars that we are now seeing it is difficult to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. The people who use force may be public agents, or private. The same applies to those who suffer the effects of force. It can be difficult to distinguish between war and large-scale criminality. Just-war theories which speak about states are difficult to apply to states which are collapsing because of internal conflicts. It becomes difficult to conduct negotiations to end conflicts because there may be nothing to negotiate about. There are new forms of action, such as intervention forces aiming at stability. ISIS, for example, though it calls itself a state, is not a state which wants to be included in the international state system, or subject itself to international law, or negotiate on its demands to conventional states. Its stance is apocalyptic, it is anticipating Armageddon in the foreseeable future. It is not possible to negotiate with it. Amongst other new factors in conflict are new technologies, such as drone warfare, use of child soldiers for intimidation of the population, use of gender-related violence as a means of terror. There is a new language about 'wars on', the war on terror, for example. New causes of conflict include control of resources such as water and food. Conflicts are often conducted at a distance as proxy conflicts. Wars are more diverse and more uncontrolled. We no longer know what war is.

#### *Peace*



Changes in the nature of conflict mean we must also redefine peace. Previously peace was a settlement between states after a conflict. But from a religious standpoint peace is about the interdependence of peoples. Interdependence is about including all humans and the natural world in one unity. It is the recognition that all humans need each other. All of us have humanity, have limitations, all of us need each other. We must become aware when we are excluding people. Migrants and refugees are part of the interdependence of all. For each of us to be secure our neighbour must also be secure. Security is indivisible. Our neighbour includes Syria and Iraq. Refusal to acknowledge that 'my security is the security of my neighbour' has tragic consequences, as we can see clearly from a distance when we watch the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The important question in a conflict is not 'how should we react?', or 'what should we be seen to be doing?' but 'how to work for the security of our neighbour?' This question is not being put at the moment. It has no easy answer.

### *Justice*

Justice is about the restoration of trusting reciprocal relationships. It is not a matter of allocating resources in a particular way. It is about mutual recognition and mutual service. Practices which disadvantage some to the advantage of others destroy mutuality, undermine interdependence, and are profoundly unjust. These include competitive economic growth, refusal of transparency as to taxation, and trade in arms.

### *Reflections on the situation in the Middle East*

We need more thinking about the arms trade and dependency on fossil fuels. Who sells arms to ISIS? Who buys oil from ISIS? We need more robust international control of these transactions. Our security must come from shared action. The arms trade is vastly profitable and the effects of the arms are uncontrollable. Control of arms sales cannot be reliable. Arms cannot be defined as defensive because it is the user who decides how to use them, possibly for aggression. Arms fairs lead to destabilisation. ISIS does not manufacture its weapons, it gets them by trading.

We need to revitalise shared security and internationalism. Pursuit of sovereignty may lead us to overlook the interdependence of states. Isolationism is popular, but misguided. Closing borders is not a solution. We must pursue international co-operation and reciprocity. This also applies to action to mitigate climate change. We must recognise that endless economic growth is not possible.

Solving conflicts is not possible by using old theories. When we see how world problems are interconnected we may feel paralysed. The existence of this lecture and the audience's presence here indicate that paralysis may at least not be complete. But we can feel more powerful if we have an inkling of what reciprocity and interdependence mean. We can do better. God can do better, through human beings. We must make a sharper diagnosis of problems, and ask unpopular questions. What sort of world do we want to live in?

Rowan Williams then responded to questions and observations from the audience. Amongst these were:

*How do you feel about bombing Syria?* Bombing in Syria by the UK is a mistake, a result of the need to be seen to be doing something and the desire to be a good ally. But it is not effective or decisive. It gives a feeling of taking action, but not of obligation to work out a long-term outcome.

*How should we deal with ISIS?* Using force against ISIS is inevitable. It must be effective. We should have worked with Russia much earlier because it has diplomatic leverage on the Syrian regime. We should put pressure on Saudi Arabia. And listen to minority communities (Yazidi, Christian) and hear their opposition to bombing. We must build capacity on the ground. Use of force is the least bad option.

*Can the use of nuclear weapons ever be justified?* The use of nuclear weapons is not justifiable. They are intrinsically indiscriminate and have dire long-term environmental effects. Their use cannot be compared to the use of the atom bomb to end the Second World War.

*Can you develop further your comments on ISIS and the Middle East?* ISIS is a massive evil. But the individuals in it are human. We know from our own experience that lives can change. We discover new possibilities in ourselves. We must not suppose that our neighbour will never change. ISIS includes people who can change, are like us.

*Please comment on the problem of secondary causation (as shown in Bible). Bible suggests God acts; now we tend to think God doesn't act.* Many people now feel that God does not act in the world. But God works in it habitually, through human interactions, and we can let God act through human lives.

*A big problem is the media. What to do?* The media pick out drama, compelling narratives, polarised forces, conflict, and zero-sum situations. The challenge is to circumvent the print media and put out a different story, create different networks, set up new chat rooms, use online resources to challenge the media stories.

*Where is the authority to challenge violence?* Authority no longer receives much recognition. The United Nations is no longer authoritative. Authorities have to earn their recognition. Authority should derive from the delivery of well-being for all. Thinking about human rights should be recast as thinking about human dignity. A few people have more authority in more than just a section of the world, including Mary Robinson, Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter, the Dalai Lama and Pope Francis.

*Should not Christians be speaking with one voice in face of international problems?* It is preposterous that the Christian family of churches is not united. The principle of 'my security is your security' also applies here. There are instances of co-operation between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. A common Christian voice can be developed, and ironically, responding to crises may enable this.

*We live in an age of secular individualism.* It is destructive if individuals deny their dependence on others, feel they owe others nothing, and feel themselves to be their own maker and saviour.

*You speak of interdependence; what of the significance of identity in defining groups?* Difference amongst humans is not to be obliterated. It does not necessarily lead to conflict. Difference is enriching. We must be who we are for the sake of our neighbour, and our neighbours must have their identity for our sake.

Summarised by Wendy Bartlett, photograph by Ursula Freeman