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# Concerning the World

## Context

Today's Church & Today's World

JOHN V. TAYLOR

Section II

A moment's thought will make it obvious that the primary benefit of the Lambeth Conference must be derived, if at all, from its being a concourse of leaders representing African, Asian and Latin American cultures as well as British and North American. If there are riches of wisdom, experience and inspiration to be garnered they will be found in our diversity, and if this fact is missed then a great many journeys will not have been really necessary. But how refreshing it is going to be to start a conference without assuming that everyone present has been influenced by the same books, tested by the same political structures, marked by the same recent history, motivated by the same images of achievement, anxious about the same questions, threatened by the same pressures or dependent upon the same kind of resources.

I hope, for example, that this Lambeth Conference will talk about the challenge to the human family of the poverty of three quarters of its members, and of what an international family of churches should do to bring effective influence to bear upon this question. But how liberating it is going to be for those who take the values of wealth and economic growth for granted to talk about these things with others who still believe that human happiness comes from a balance of relationships with nature and one's fellow men, a balance which the individual pursuit of wealth can easily destroy.

I hope that together we shall see more significant and far-reaching possibilities in the idea of 'Partnership in Mission', which has already caught the imagination of the Anglican Communion. But how much more creative the dialogue will be when those who think that the Cross and its message is something that they carry to others as efficiently as they can, find themselves talking with those for whom the Cross is something under which they stagger with no efficiency but their dogged witness to the truth.

I would hazard a guess, therefore, that the best use that I and my fellow bishops can make of these preparatory articles is to give the greatest share of our attention to those of them that have been written by representatives of other backgrounds and cultures than our own. We should read and re-read in particular the articles in Section I by Dr Fasholé-Luke, the Rev. A. C. Oommen and Samuel Escobar; Dr Kosuke Koyama's and Bishop Wickremesinghe's in Section II; Dr José Miguez-Bonino's in Section III; and Professor John Pobee's in Section IV. From these and the other articles by writers from the Third World it would be well to compose one's

personal anthology of statements that startled on first reading like a voice from another world. My own anthology already contains the following:

Often the churches are conservative and traditionalist, while African traditional religion may be innovative and progressive. Government may be either.  
(Fasholé-Luke)

Is not technology forcing us to re-experience the holy? Can the holy be experienced non-liturgically? From the air? (Koyama)

What is the meaning of being 'father' when you have no protection to offer, no food to provide, no wisdom to transmit because your brain and your heart are damaged, and your eyes look without light or tears at the newborn baby lying on the floor? ... We know today that such poverty is neither an accident nor a mystery. It is not a disconnected fact, but the inevitable and quite normal result of a total situation determined by the laws, goals and structures of the economic system that we have developed. (Bonino)

When change, rather than order, is the premise ... if it (the church) sincerely wants to reduce conflict, it should work for a maximum of consciousness of the need for change and of consent to change. (Bonino)

We (bishops) may have to empty ourselves deliberately of external authorities, so that the internal power may be more obvious. (Oommen)

The position of a bishop is not any more the comfortable crown of a priest's career. It has become a dangerous position where every word and every move can mean attacks from left and right, problems with the Government, and even the threat of an 'accidental' death. (Escobar)

Section II contains six essays on the 'World Context', and variously refers to dominant influences affecting the life of humanity—technology, traditional cultures, change in ethical judgements, religious pluralism, nationalism and internationalism. Some of the omissions in this section are rather strange. One would have expected to see here a full treatment of world poverty and the challenge to the economic systems which perpetuate it, rather than having that topic dealt with in the next section on the 'Church Context'. Another issue, closely related, is that of revolution and violence which, perhaps more than any other subject, has troubled and divided the churches during the past decade. Immigration, including the resettlement of political refugees, is surely another major issue affecting the world community in our day. So is unemployment and the world's work-force, which Sinclair Goodlad touches upon but which deserves an essay to itself. And what about the crisis in education which is becoming more than a merely western problem?

## **A mood of reaction**

The first essay in this second section has the title 'Dominant Influences in the Current World'. It pains me to be critical of Margaret Dewey, whose contribution to the thinking of the USPG I have greatly admired. But I think it was unkind to give her so large and undefined a brief. She has tried to refer to so much in so short a space that reading her essay is like walking the streets on Guy Fawkes night with staccato generalizations popping off like squibs on all sides and under one's very feet. On page 47, for example, we meet Marx and Engels, Lewis Morgan, Burke and Lenin,

each decked out with a few words and all contained in six lines of print.

One wonders who she is writing for. Her essay begins with a rather disapproving air, as she ends her short introduction with the words 'it behoves us to be critically alert.' One feels certain, as she stalks off towards the woodshed, that she is not going to like whatever she finds there. It turns out to be Darwin, Marx, Freud and Jung. She deals with them in a quite summary fashion. We learn that Freud missed the real point of the Oedipus myth and later lost his nerve. Jung gets more favoured treatment, and I like the witty aside, referring to his insights into the 'shadow-self', that 'political dissension, too, is mostly "shadow-boxing".'

After that the attack is turned against television, and this paragraph strikes me as superficial and one-sided. TV may certainly foster the false values of the consumer society. It may become an addictive drug to people who would otherwise probably sit looking at the wallpaper. But TV also encourages curiosity, self-reliance and perseverance. One has only to mention the extraordinary stimulation of interest in wildlife, cookery, sailing, do-it-yourself handicrafts, to realize that the record should be much more balanced than this.

Margaret Dewey then goes on to say on page 50 that 'Parental abdication of responsibility leaves schools an impossible task, made worse by "progressive" educational fashions.' She is perfectly right, of course, to include the worldwide educational crisis among the dominant influences that are affecting us all today, but again a one-sided generalization makes the issue far too simple. Such a statement simply ignores the immense changes in social *mores* which have taken place on a world scale, and fails to discern the very different forms that this educational crisis takes in different cultures and different economic situations, all of which will be represented at Canterbury.

A brief recognition of the problem of religious language, which could well occupy a sub-section of the Conference for the whole of the three weeks, is unhelpful when conjoined with an expression of personal prejudice against modern English translations of the Bible and Prayer Book. But then those who pontificate about the aesthetic finality of the King James or 1662 are always unaware of the insularity of their protest and ignore the fact that a majority of the Bibles that are sold or read today are contemporary translations: modern Swahili, modern Spanish, and so on.

After another splutter of fireworks on almost every remaining subject under the sun, the essay concludes with a section applauding the new ecological awareness and a final page warning us against the facile polarization of our human problems: 'In all revolutions for liberation, there is an apparent recovery of innocence through polarization (locating evil in your oppressor).' That is well said. The whole essay, however, seems to me to be in danger of doing precisely that. Its value in the whole collection is that it represents fairly accurately a mood of reaction through which Britain and some other western countries are currently passing. The desperate anxiety to be 'with it' is being replaced by the dangerous silliness

of being 'agin' it.' The catchwords of this mood—discipline, rationality, certainty and authority—have a natural appeal to our storm-tossed and confused generation. But just because the Lambeth Conference coincides with such a trough between two waves, the Bishops should steady themselves against the temptation to hear the veering wind as the voice of God or to give the weight of their *imprimatur* to a change of humour.

### Challenge to action

The second article looks at 'Some Influences of Technology on Contemporary Life and Thought'. Dr Goodlad writes from a unique position: he is Senior Lecturer in Literature and Sociology in that citadel of technology, Imperial College of Science and Technology in London. He has taught in Delhi and Massachusetts, too, so he knows the wider international world from first-hand experience, and he presents us with a well-ordered and apparently impartial account of the technological story so far.

He starts by reminding us that technology is not new: whole civilizations have been named after their dominant forms of technology, for example the Stone Age, the Iron Age, the Bronze Age. There is no reason to doubt that Stone Age men felt as ambivalent about their technology as we do. Goodlad points out that most of our anxieties about the more dramatic scientific innovations arise from the rare occasions when they go wrong — the diffusion of strontium 90 after atomic tests, for example, or the explosion of the chemical works at Flixborough. What perhaps deserves more of our attention is the gravity and complexity that technological developments add to the moral and political choices we have to make. He instances the elaborate new techniques for prolonging biological function beyond what would formerly have been defined as the moment of death, or for detecting deformity very early in the life of a foetus. The moral issue concerning the termination of life was there long before these developments, but they have certainly made it more complex.

The essay next touches briefly on the ways in which medical research, telecommunications, high technology industry, and the electronic processing of information affect the lives of human beings today. It appears that our real problems emerge not from the existence of these new techniques but from the use we make of them. Should we invest resources in the immensely expensive techniques of rarified medical treatment, or in a widespread dissemination of basic or preventive medicine? Should television or tourism be developed to provide an ever more efficient escape from boring work and ugly homes, instead of spending our resources on making work more rewarding and cities more favourable to a sense of community? Must advanced technology always move in the direction of capital-intensive rather than labour-intensive industry? Must it always serve to make the already powerful more powerful still?

The most useful section of this essay analyses some of the values and assumptions which the development of technology seems to impose

on society, and which the Christian church should challenge in some appropriate manner. These are:

- i) The greater viability of large complex organizations which generate a sense of powerlessness in people.
- ii) The precisely detailed regulations required to control technical systems, such as transport or food processing, which generate the idea that all social problems can best be dealt with by legislation.
- iii) The growing dependence on technical experts in all areas of life which begins to make it 'unprofessional' to help another person without a licence to do so!
- iv) The ever-narrower specialization in education and training which treats people as technical 'functions', and destroys all sense of a *whole* world of knowledge or of relationships.
- v) The compulsion to believe that because something can be done it *should* be done, which has led governments and private enterprise to accept a technical challenge to do things that might better not have been undertaken.

But is the Christian church competent to question effectually these values of the technological society? The church which still celebrates the memory of its great 'doctors' of the earlier centuries has done little to encourage the growth of a Christian scholarship capable of understanding and matching critically the ablest scientific or administrative minds of our day. We are perhaps, as a church, beginning to glimpse the fact that Christian witness in the modern world has got to become more collective and more political. But we have to recognize that for the past four hundred years westernized society has looked with favour on only one collective function, namely the organizing of men's labour in the production of saleable goods and services. All other functions of normal human society—its leisure, its religion, its morality—which were equally corporate in previous centuries, have been deliberately privatized and, in the name of emancipation, made a matter of individual choice. The church is still not expected to exercise a corporate, institutional influence upon the structures of power in our society, and if it starts to do so it must expect strong opposition.

### Traditional cultures

In the third essay of this section we meet a spokesman of Asia. Dr Kosuke Koyama is now Senior Lecturer in the Phenomenology of Religion at Dunedin, New Zealand. Before that he worked as a Japanese missionary in Thailand, where he was Lecturer in Theology and Dean of the South East Asia School of Theology. Those who have read his *Water Buffalo Theology* and *No Handle on the Cross* will expect a refreshing originality, and they will not be disappointed. He distinguishes between traditional cultures that are at home with traditional technologies, and a science-based culture which is at home in science-based technologies. He prefers to

describe our present situation as a time of *coexistence* rather than of an inevitable transition from one to the other.

Then he analyses very brilliantly three of the characteristics of traditional culture in non-Western societies. He illustrates the first of these characteristics with a creation-myth from New Zealand in which a Promethean hero, finding Earth and Sky locked together in a close embrace, forces them apart so as to create enough space for the human race to breathe and move and develop in freedom. The awkward and painfully-strained posture of the saviour-figure speaks to Koyama of a certain 'inefficiency' which seems to be necessary for the maintenance of human values and meaning, in contrast to the 'streamlined efficient posture' of modern technology which all too often 'paralyses the social fabrics of the cherished traditional values'.

The second characteristic of the traditional cultures which he chooses to emphasize is the deep sense of man's relationship to the whole of nature and the cosmos which is both enchanted and enchanting. People are naturally orientated to a simple and ancient cosmological image: 'The image of the cosmos is the image of life. It is the image of wisdom. To be alive is to be conformed to this image.' Scientific technology is devised in order to give man *control* over nature so as to use and exploit its powers. When this happens the relationship of enchantment, which is also a relationship of reverence, is diminished and begins to die.

The third characteristic is obviously related to this. It is the appreciation of holiness. 'Traditional cultures abound with holy places: holy temple, holy shrine, holy icons, holy men, holy day, holy tree, holy cave and so on... The holy demands man to approach slowly, carefully, humbly and even painfully. That which is controlled cannot be called the holy.'

While recognizing these ancient values in the traditional cultures, and the extent to which they are menaced by the inroads of scientific technology, Koyama does not reject modernity or internationalism. He is too much of a realist for that. But for him the coexistence of two cultures raises questions which might not occur to us western Christians. After defining the Cross as the maximum expression of 'inefficient and *therefore* intense love', he asks: 'Where do we see the symbols of inefficiency in our community? Where do we see the foolishness of God which is wiser than men?' As a Christian, Koyama also sees holiness in that 'something in man which refuses to be systematized and controlled'. The very failure of technology, including sociology, to handle and control man effectively points to this indestructible freedom and dignity which is the element in man that corresponds to the enchanted and enchanting quality of the cosmos. And so he poses this question for the church: 'How to keep this dignity of man alive so that we can retain the meaningful experience of the holy in the technological age? And how is the holiness of the crucified Lord (controlled Lord) related to this discussion?'

I wish that the members of the Lambeth Conference who are to deal

with this section could listen to Dr Koyama discussing those questions with, for example, some of the lecturers at Imperial College, London, who are deeply conscious of the numinous they encounter through their scientific and technological work. So far as I understand this essay, neither he nor they would wish to set the values of the traditional cultures over against those of scientific technology. Koyama is looking for a reconciliation, and believes that one is possible. If the bishops at Canterbury are to do the same, it is important that they be aware of what technologists are saying *today*, for they are asking profoundly theological questions. Yesterday's views are out-of-date, yet yesterday's may be the only ones most of us are aware of.

### A vision of creation

Keith Ward is a kind of Pooh-Bah at Trinity Hall, Cambridge: Fellow, Dean and Chaplain. His essay on 'Changing Ethical Values' is a pleasure to read, and is so closely written that any form of summary is difficult.

He sees the greatest change in ethical values in the modern world in that, whereas once we asked 'What moral aims should we respond to?' now we ask: 'How should we live, now that there are no such things as moral values at all?'

Those who first divorced morality from religion thought we could continue to talk of a moral imperative. Without God, however, the ontological status of the moral law evaporates. Ward believes that morality is now voyaging between Scylla and Charybdis—between a total loss of vision and idealism on the one hand, and on the other hand, an intolerant and repressive rule-worship. Within Christianity these are the extremes of antinomianism and legalism, and within a totally secular culture he sees the pendulum swinging forever between the two.

He then produces a view which he identifies as typical of the tradition of Anglican moral theology. It is neither a static legalism nor can it be called 'situation ethics'. He calls it 'Christian personalism'. It is derived from a captivating and demanding vision of creation as 'a personal, imaginative and constantly developing process', which reflects the dynamic, inter-personal life of the Blessed Trinity.

He proceeds to apply this view to three areas in which ethical values are undergoing great change: personal relations, responsibility for life, and the changed political situation of the world. With regard to the first of these he writes: 'The church has been legalistic on these issues, and has thus, I believe, betrayed her Lord on the most profound level, in making his words of demanding forgiveness into rules of hypocritical legislation. Jesus forbids divorce, as he forbids lust, anger and deception; but he forgives all our failures, and enables us to start again, relying on grace alone, not complete obedience. The church, however, has insisted on the letter of obedience with regard to divorce, while herself expressing intolerance and anger in many of her most solemn pronouncements. The



ethics of Christian personalism is clear; the values to be pursued are those which reflect the nature of God: trust, loyalty, truthfulness and sympathy.'

His treatment of responsibility for life is equally good though, in the new and more indefinite areas of decision, he counsels rather more caution than in the area of personal relations where we have already had time for so much more thought.

Turning to the world-wide political situation, Ward is happily free from the bogey-fears with regard to Marxism. It may not be an option for the Christian; but even while he rejects it, there is a lot he should learn from it: 'Even in a relatively just society, the church should in practice still be on the side of the poor, the relatively deprived. Until it actually is, it will have nothing of interest to say in politics, except to support the *status quo*; and arguments by the privileged on their own behalf never carry much weight.'

### An unspoken thesis

Bishop Wickremesinghe offers a well constructed piece on the resurgence of Asian religions and the response that Christianity should make in that context. There is nothing very new in what he says, but its simple clarity presents a challenge.

He discerns three stages in the development of the response that the church makes towards other faiths in its environment. The first step is adaptation. The church baptizes into its own tradition and truth more of the outward aspects of the religions that are its neighbours. Churches begin to look more like temples; flowers are offered; lights and drums and dances are used.

The next stage he calls naturalization, by which he means relating the insights of other religions to the Christ-centred vision. In this stage lessons from the scriptures of other religions are used; terms are borrowed from the theology or the spirituality of another religion; symbols are borrowed from its art. The third stage he calls dialogue, by which he means something more far-reaching than is usually encompassed by that word. He means 'sharing and co-operating with persons of other faiths in a spirit of love, openness and the desire for mutual enrichment.' He means 'learning to incorporate the spiritual experiences and vision of other religionists into their own religious vision and experience.'

It is clear that the bishop is describing something that he has seen actually happening. He is not, as many writers on interfaith relations do, stating merely what *ought* to be attempted. But one is forced to wonder how often or how widely these things are taking place. It must largely depend on the courage and strength of conviction of a particular individual whose personality and commitment are the real guarantee against a limp syncretism. That is always the way with pioneers. Their isolation does not discredit the truth they stand for, but it limits it.

Bishop Wickremesinghe supports his examples with 27 references from

Scripture and the Church Fathers. This suggests that underlying this article is another carefully argued theological thesis that would hold its own among the many that have been written on the other faiths of mankind and their significance in the Christian view. The fascination of this piece is that so much of that thesis is unspoken while what appears is the visible outworking of it in practical questions and answers. It will be interesting to see what kind of debate such a treatment gives rise to.

### **Developing a paradox**

The last of the essays in this Section II is Bishop Hugh Montefiore's on 'Nationalism and Internationalism.' He begins with that which is nearest his heart, the cause of ecology, and lets it lead him naturally to a world-view. For pollution knows no boundaries and modern technology makes the nations of the world more and more interdependent.

He goes on to develop the paradox that nationalism is a necessary starter to the wider internationalism: 'A country that does not hold the affection and loyalty of its citizens will have little to contribute to the well-being of the world.' Yet nationalism is a kind of corporate egotism which becomes the ultimate bar to any wider global feeling of community.

The Bishop quotes Barbara Ward to show how the nation-state galvanized the energy and determination that was needed to shift mankind from a static agricultural economy to a dynamic technological system. But he seems to have ignored the opposite truth: that the competitive nation-state, like the competitive private individual, was a necessary factor which capitalistic economics had to foster in order to progress. This raises the question whether our present economic system can ever prove favourable to a global internationalism which demands as a precondition the elimination of competition.

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It is difficult to say what these six essays add up to, let alone the forty that make up the whole book. Are they really going to help the bishops to identify the issues that ought to engage their attention and prayer, or to see the nature of their tasks and their problems more clearly? I have my doubts, mainly because too few of the themes are explored at any theological depth.

The book itself is bound with a strangely resilient spine. Even now, after a good deal of wear and tear, it refuses to stay open unless held firmly in both hands or spread-eagled under considerable weights. The moral of this may be that it is best taken in small doses and then closed, so that the reader may think his own thoughts.

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