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Religion and Diplomacy

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Abstract

Archbishop Runcie's presentation represents well his interest in and experience of the complex intersection between religion and world events. Both his consideration of the difficult history of the Christian Church, and his call to greater understanding of other religions reflect his long work with and commitment to these issues. His refusal to simplify the problems tied to religion is characteristic both of his efforts to find real solutions to world problems and his intellectual rigor.

Comments

Boardman Lecture XXXIV. Edited and Foreword by Erica C. Gelser.

The Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics
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XXXIV

RELIGION AND DIPLOMACY:

Delivered Before
The University of Pennsylvania
November 16, 1995

By

**The Rt. Revd. Lord Robert Runcie
Retired Archbishop of Canterbury**

Edited by
Erica Gelser

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University of Pennsylvania

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Foreword

The thirty-fourth Dana Boardman Lecture of Christian Ethics at the University of Pennsylvania was delivered by the Rt. Revd. Lord Robert Runcie, Retired Archbishop of Canterbury. Archbishop Runcie's presentation represents well his interest in and experience of the complex intersection between religion and world events. Both his honest consideration of the difficult history of the Christian Church, and his call to greater understanding of other religions reflect his long work with and commitment to these issues. His refusal to simplify the problems tied to religion is characteristic both of his efforts to find real solutions to world problems and his intellectual rigor.

Archbishop Runcie is an academic, religious leader, and international advocate for peace and understanding among people of different cultures and religions. He has taught both Classics and Church History and continues to do research in these areas. As Bishop of St. Albans and Archbishop of Canterbury he traveled extensively and participated in many ecumenical discussions. He is a founding member of The Religious Forum for Global Survival. In addition, as the leader of the diverse and fractious Anglican community, Archbishop Runcie's own mediating skills have been tested: among other duties, he presided successfully over the difficult Lambeth conference in 1988 at which social issues were hotly debated. Recently, he has continued his commitment to the study of many religions by becoming an ambassador for the Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies at Cambridge University. He participates in several organizations devoted to social issues, such as international aid and development, and the Church's activity in inner cities.

I would like to thank Professor E. Ann Matter for her assistance in preparing this publication.

Erica C. Gelser
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Faculty, 1995-96

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RELIGION AND DIPLOMACY

During the 1939/45 War I was a combatant soldier in north-west Europe. When it ended I was attached as a young staff officer to the Four Party Italo-Yugoslav Boundary Commission. Our task was to draw boundaries between Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia. The American delegation was led by an ethnic expert. There was a French delegation led by a diplomat and an economist. The Russians were led by a good party politician. The British had a lawyer who had never been to that part of the world but knew how to ask pertinent questions. It was my first introduction to official diplomacy. I was completely fascinated by it. I postponed my return to Oxford to complete my undergraduate education in order to see it through. We toured around the border lands and discovered what language people used at home or in school or at church - whether Serbo-Croat, Slovene or Italian, what customs and attitudes flavored their lives.

Being young I was inclined to be cynical. It seemed to me that each delegation knew the line which it intended to draw before it listened to any evidence. I was perhaps over critical; for this was one of the few major border disputes that has been settled amicably by compromise between the nations. So far, this has been one corner of the ghastly mess which was once Yugoslavia which has not produced major conflict. However, one criticism which I felt even then and which still has force is that none of the delegations knew much about religion. Without a sense of history and religion, it was difficult to understand the passions of the people whose destiny we were ordering. It was a huge influence on all the parties to the conflict. Perhaps the all-too-contemporary awfulness of Fascism, and the growing threat of Stalinist Communism, provided a misleading alibi for interpreting the terrible things which were still happening in the region. There was more to it than that, as we have now realized.

Last year in Cyprus I met a Serbian bishop. I have known him for many years. He is a saintly pastor, and a dedicated patriot. "We lived under the Muslims for 300 years", he said; "they must never be allowed to get a foot-hold in Europe again. That is what we are fighting for. Why do you not understand?" I quote that

little story not because I approve of his sentiments, but because his question "Why do you not understand?" remains as a deep reproach to the West. It is an indictment of the short-sightedness or shallowness with which the democratic Western mind has approached so many of the diplomatic entanglements which it has faced.

In the last fifty years we have repeatedly made this mistake. The fallacy that in a secularizing world, religion would cease to be a factor of importance in international relations has been exposed again and again. In Iran in the late 1970s Ayatollah Khomeini first overthrew a self-styled "progressive," "modernizing" state government, and then outmaneuvered Iranian politicians who genuinely believed in progress and modernization.

It was not just godless Russian politicians who were taken completely by surprise. Equally perplexed were the diplomats and Iran-watchers in the United States of America, bastion of Western Christianity in all its diversity. Then the same mistake was made in the moment of democratic intoxication in Europe at the end of 1989. The Berlin Wall came down. In Romania, angry shouts from the crowds brought a sudden look of fear and bewilderment to the face of Nicolae Ceausescu on his Presidential balcony in Bucharest." The image was captured on film, which for all time will be an icon of tyranny crumbling. It was easy to feel then that all tyranny would crumble. How far away now that moment seems, when one writer could confidently talk of the end of history, and of the unchallenged ideological supremacy of western-style, participatory, capitalist free-market society.

Perhaps most perplexing for Western Christians is not the clash between conservative Shia Islam and the Soviet or Western materialism, or between Muslim and Serb in the former Yugoslavia, but the deep visceral hatreds between Christian and Christian. One can understand, although not condone, the way in which historic rivals of faith or ideology fight for mastery: these are the conflicts of one entire system of ideas which seeks to

annihilate the other. So Christianity developed the language of Crusade, Islam speaks of Jihad, and classical Marxism envisages history as the struggle of classes. But what are we to make of life-and-death struggles within Christianity, the religion of love and forgiveness? To begin to understand these, we need to realize just how deep-rooted is the conflict within Christianity between the particular or the local and the universal. We will need to go right back to the beginnings of the Christian Church.

Christianity is a self-proclaimed universalist religion. It began as a rebellious offshoot of Judaism, a faith which had a complex attitude to its place in the world. Certainly the Jewish people did proclaim their particular separateness and uniquely privileged place in the eyes of God; yet they did so in order to proclaim the good news of God to the whole world. Judaism had messages for all people: its prophets Amos, Hosea and Isaiah preached that all slaves should be freed, not just Jewish slaves, and that the one God was the God of all. So Judaism's unique privilege and its difference came to be seen as its teaching role for the world: an obligation to act morally, to be a light to the nations.

The form of Christianity which became dominant took this universalist message and transformed it: that is why it broke with its Jewish parent. Here I am on delicate ground, because so often Christians have caricatured Judaism in the age of Jesus Christ in order to justify how Christianity developed. Perhaps I should describe what happened simply in terms of what the early Christians thought that they were doing. They saw themselves as pulling down barriers built around Judaism: barriers which for many first-century Jews were precisely what symbolized their teaching role for the world. Notoriously, the best-known spokesman for this transformation, Paul of Tarsus, repeatedly proclaimed that in Christ there is no difference between Jew and Greek. He extended this list in his epistle to the Galatians into a three-fold abolition: no difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female.

The Galatians message lies like a ticking bomb at the base of every clerical or social structure. It says, "when Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" It says, as Jesus challenged to a young man of wealth, "give away all you have and follow me". It says what the Grand Inquisitor says to Christ in The Brothers Karamazov. In other words, the institutional Church stands on a seething and unstable core of love and equality.

However, the intellectual afterlife of this passage of Galatians is significant. In the first place, it was the vision of a man who was convinced that the Roman world which he knew was about to shrivel up and be replaced by the kingdom of Christ. The abolition of difference would be the central characteristic of this new order of existence. The Galatians proclamation was so radical as to relate very imperfectly to the everyday world of the first-century Roman Empire. In the Pauline tradition, it stands alongside what appears to be a directly contradictory line of rhetoric: wives obey your husbands, slaves obey your masters, children obey your parents. This second list was a code for a world in which the Last Judgment did not in the event come quickly, and it was this formula which set the norms of Christian practice, which were not especially different from the norms of the society round about it. Far from challenging the status quo in everyday life, Pauline Christianity rapidly became ready to reinforce it.

Therefore the abolition of difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female was of strictly limited everyday significance. If the Galatians proclamation did have an immediate practical relevance, it was largely through its first clause: no difference between Jew and Greek. This was important because it touched on the basic Christian revolt from Jewish identity. Apart from that, Paul's proclamation was not taken as a practical program of action. Its reference was to the spiritual relationships in the world. Only gradually has it taken on new resonances for everyday society, resonances which the early Christians did not hear. Only in the eighteenth century did

Western Christianity begin its wholehearted commitment to the abolition of slavery worldwide, and in the United States, you hardly need me to tell you how bitter a struggle it was to establish this idea as normative. Now in the twentieth, we are beginning to explore how the third clause might cause a similar transformation in the relationships between the sexes; and the struggle is again a bitter and painful one.

To say that in Christ there was neither Jew nor Greek did have a further practical significance in the late first century of the Common Era. Even if after it had done its work of separating Christianity from Judaism, the statement seemed to describe the Christian Church as it was: It was fairly culturally homogenous body, a fusion of a Greek with a Jewish heritage. In terms of ideas, Christianity very quickly became concerned with oneness. Christians argued fiercely about the boundaries of their faith, and the Christians who won these arguments were those who wished to impose unity and uniformity on the Christian proclamation: they called the Christianity which resulted "universal", or in Greek Katholikos. So Christian universality now had two aspects: unlike Judaism, it was a religion self-consciously available to all without qualification, yet it was also universal because it was the same everywhere.

The Christians of Paul's successor-church were therefore one in their culture. Characteristically they were urban people who spoke a form of workaday Greek which was the common language of trading people in cities all round the Mediterranean. Even in Rome, most Christians seem to have spoken this Greek rather than Latin for a century or so after Paul's death. But after that came the first of Christianity's cultural divides. Christianity began capturing the allegiance of the aristocracy and administrative class in the Western Empire. This meant that its western identity became increasingly Latin-speaking; and that would have profound consequences for its future. The split between Latin West and Greek East was given a political reinforcement in the late third century when the Empire itself was officially divided for administrative purposes between west

and east. That history lies behind the most profound Christian division of all: between Western Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

However, the story which we have traced so far is still of a Christianity contained within the structure of the Roman empire: one of the most successful political units of all time. This empire itself proclaimed the idea of universality. At its greatest extent, at the time when Christianity was first spreading widely, the Empire contained the whole of the Mediterranean, and its frontiers stretched from southern Scotland to Iraq. Although Christianity's relations with Roman authority were often tense, it was not a religion which challenged the existence of this political giant; rather Christianity was the prisoner of the Roman Empire, communicating through the medium of its two main languages, and finding it difficult to spread outside its boundaries. Eventually, through political accidents which need not concern us, the Church actually allied with the imperial power and gained an established place within government. This was in 325 with the foundation of Constantinople. Only gradually and piecemeal was a non-imperial Christianity created, first on the eastern fringes of the Empire, in Syria, and then in Armenia.

What is noticeable about the Christian plantings beyond the Empire is that they tended to define themselves over against Christianity within the Empire. It was not simply that they communicated to their own people in their own languages and scripts - Syriac, Armenian, for instance. They often clung fiercely to theological points of difference from imperial Christianity, at a time when there was still much to argue about in the basic Christian framework. Even within the Empire, when serious disagreement developed, different cultural and language groups championed different understanding of the faith. When the imperial authorities championed one understanding as the only officially acceptable one, alternative theologies were cherished as marks of rebellion: by the Copts of Egypt, for instance, the Nestorians of Assyria. So it has been suggested that

one of the reasons for the rapid Islamic success when Islamic armies attacked the Byzantine Empire, was that many such alienated Christian groups welcomed the invaders as liberators from the official imperial Church which they hated.

Semitic-speaking Christians did not want their doctrines to be shaped to fit Greek philosophical exactitude. The statement of Mohammed that Christians and Jews had complicated the simple message of Abraham and Jesus appealed to them.

Let us recap this lightning survey of the first six centuries of Christian history. We have seen a faith develop which certainly had a commitment to universalism: openness to all, and oneness in belief. Probably that is one reason why fourth-century emperors allied with it, seeing these universal claims as a potential source of unity, keeping together their huge territories. Yet this faith had also become one of cultural and political divisions. Versions of it had already become identified with cultural and linguistic groupings and these divisions eventually helped to pull the Roman Empire apart.

In the West from the fifth century, a new sort of universality would succeed to that of the fallen Western Empire, and it was universally identified with the Catholic Church. Partly this was *faute de mieux*. When the structures of the Empire disappeared, often there was no vehicle left to represent the old culture or give it coherence other than the church. Bishops and their clergy functioned in some sense like the last surviving wing of the Roman imperial service. This was a recurrent feature of the centuries which followed; whenever alternative power structures faltered and decayed, the Church asserted its everyday power in everyday society. One of the most remarkable developments of the tenth century was the concept of the peace or the truce of God, which developed in France where the monarchy had virtually collapsed into anarchy. Thereafter the peace of God ideal was to be found in parts of Europe where the same political circumstances arose. In the middle of chaos, bishops of the Church met in council and declared that Christians should never

kill Christians. They gave their reason in a very basic theological analogy: "For no one doubts that to kill a Christian is to shed the blood of Christ."

It was impossible for bishops to suppress violence; it was built into the society of their day. But they could extend peace as far as they could. They protected certain places and people - forbidding warriors to storm and plunder churches, attack helpless peasants and merchants, for instance. Another approach to the truce of God was to forbid violence on the most holy days of the year: Easter for instance, or even every Sunday - or even, by extension, the days of every week leading up to the Sundays, from Wednesday evening onwards. The bishops were probably pushing their luck by that stage; but they achieved much in a violent age and they created some structure and rules of conduct where there had been none. These are the origins of humanitarian laws in time of war. They are still around in the United Nations and in courts such as at the Nuremberg Trials.

The peace of God movement was one remarkable new development of the idea in Galatians that in Christ there was neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free - at least within the society of Christians. And just as the peace movement developed, another symbol of Christian unity in the West was taking powerful shape, a symbol which endures within the Christian world to this day. One bishop built on the ancient prestige of his diocese in Rome to act as a focus for unity in western society. The culmination of this new universality in the twelfth century was a claim by the Popes in Rome to universal monarchy. It was a claim which it must be said was never accepted by the churches of the East. Even in the West it proved impossible to turn the claim into reality, in the face of the suspicions of secular rulers, especially because of hostility from a rival symbol of western unity, the Holy Roman Emperor.

Nevertheless the medieval Western Church produced an overarching framework of thinking and institutions which for centuries successfully transcended cultural and linguistic

identities. From the twelfth century, when the papal claim to universal monarchy was formalized, the papacy built up a code of universal law, canon law, which was administered in church courts throughout Europe, and which was remarkably successful in shaping and regulating western society. Just as successful was the idea of unity which survived even the murderous disputes between the popes and the Holy Roman Emperors. It was an idea which was given plausibility by the use of the universal language, Latin, by the foundation of international religious orders, and more regrettably in our eyes, by the military campaigns of the Crusades against non-Christians. Anyone who is sensitive to the style of Romanesque and Gothic church buildings from the Shetlands to the Holy Land will perceive the cultural unity of this world.

Because of all this, the medieval West was indeed a single society, a respublica Christiana. This phrase could be translated a "Christian commonwealth" or simply as "Christendom". It was an idea which owed as much to the Roman Empire as to Christianity and this fact was increasingly obvious because alongside canon laws, the law of the old empire was revived as civil law. This was not a dead legal code; it grew alongside canon law as a standard for regulating the lives of people within the Christian commonwealth, even providing guidelines for their relationships with non-Christians, just as the imperial law-code had done. It was the first system of international law. With two such powerful sources, Christ and the Roman Empire, the idea of a universal society has had an enduring fascination for Europe - and so for America. Perhaps the most striking symbol of this Christian society with a common purpose was the moment in 1494 when the then Pope, Alexander VI, acted as a referee between the Spanish and Portuguese Monarchies and allotted to them separated spheres of influence in the new lands which they were discovering outside Europe in Africa and America. We do not need to approve of what Alexander did to see the significance of it.

Yet this was just the moment when the structures of the medieval respublica Christiana were fatally fractured. Partly it was that individual monarchies were getting too powerful to set much store by the idea of a universal society which would constrain them. Their relationships were increasingly governed by expediency, without much consideration for the special character of Christendom. The King of France, whose title was “the most Christian King”, allied with the Ottoman Turks against his hated Christian enemy the Holy Roman Emperor. One of the images of this mood which has struck me forcibly recently is the cover illustration of a new history of the Knights of Malta: one of the military orders set up specially to defend medieval Christendom against Islam. The picture is the reproduction of a miniature showing Prince Zizim, brother of the Ottoman Sultan, being feasted by the Knights in their then headquarters on the island of Rhodes. They had granted him asylum against his brother; so here were the brethren of organizations sworn to fight the infidel, who had chosen to ally with one infidel against another to further their long-term aims. The realism of Macchiavelli was transforming the chivalric ideal of the Middle Ages. There could be no more telling symbol of the new atmosphere in which Renaissance power politicians operated, and the Church was drawn in like everyone else.

But the fatal blow to the ideal of Christendom was dealt by the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Half of Europe rejected the idea that the Pope had a special role in God’s plan. As the official statement of faith of my own Church put it in 1563, “The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England”. This was not a rejection of the link between church and political power which had begun in the Roman Empire. Quite the contrary; secular monarchs seized control of the Church from the Pope for themselves, and in practice there was very little difference in the political position of Protestant or Catholic rulers. Whether rulers were Catholic or Protestant, they all affirmed the identification of the Church with the whole of society. They persecuted radical Christians of that time who went back to the foundation documents of Christianity and tried

to separate Christianity completely from politics. Once monarchs had rejected the Pope's universal authority, there was no limit on the power of individual political units. Even the Pope went quiet about the idea of his universal monarchy during the seventeenth century. The concept of the sovereign state became dominant: it banished the medieval idea of a universal society to the margins. The sovereign state is still with us.

Most of these sovereign states started as family businesses; that is they were multi-national entities, representing the power of a royal or imperial dynasty rather than an individual grouping of a national language. Many of them therefore borrowed the classical and medieval word for a power with no superior supreme over several peoples, and called themselves empires; their model was the so-called Holy Roman Empire, by then itself a family business of the Hapsburg dynasty. During the seventeenth century most states also took on a single official version of Christian identity, after a series of hideously destructive confessional wars. However, some of these dynastic sovereign states could and did make a further and very significant identification. They allied with a particular language grouping, something which had rarely been a decisive factor in the politics of medieval Europe. This was beginning to happen in France during the seventeenth century; then the French Revolution and its aftermath would give renewed power to the alliance between power-structure and language-grouping.

The ideology of the French Revolution, exported throughout Europe, was that the state was the people in arms. Naturally this was most persuasive an image where the people could all understand each other's language. The classic case of such a success in nation-state building in the nineteenth century is Italy, but it is instructive to see how much myth-making was necessary even for this text-book example: a single modern Italian language was virtually created alongside the many regional versions of Italian, in order to make the Italian nation-state plausible. Such a sovereign nation-state claimed an intimate relationship with its people's identity. In the aftermath of the

First World War, the victorious allies did their best to create yet more nation-states on the ruins of the dynastic states which had fought themselves to destruction. President Woodrow Wilson had the idea that self-determination was founded upon the nineteenth century liberal idea that humanity was naturally divided into nations, and that every nations should have its own state. It is arguable that this notion has cost as many lives as the ideology of Stalin. It redowns to the credit of Robert Lansing, Wilson's Secretary of State, that he said this at the time; "The more I think about the President's declaration as to the right of self-determination, the more convinced I am of the danger of putting such ideas into the minds of certain races. It is bound to the basis of impossible demands. What effect will it have on the Irish, the Indians, the Egyptians, and the nationalists among the Boers? Will it not breed rebellion? The phrase is simply loaded with dynamite. It will raise hopes that can never be realized. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives. In the end it is bound to be discredited, to be the called the dream of an idealist... What a calamity that the phrase was ever uttered."

In 1918 one fatally unresolved question was whether the nation-state existed to serve its people, or the people to serve the nation-state. Democrats give one answer, authoritarian, Fascists and Stalinists another. Out of this confusion came the awful events of the Second World War.

So it was in those chaotic months of 1945, that I found myself involved in a further piece of tidying-up of these nation-states on the borders of Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia. Even at the time, we all agreed that the neatest solution would have been to restore the Austro-Hungarian empire after its quarter-century of oblivion. At least the recreation of a Hapsburg dynastic state would have left all nationalities equally and impartially discontented. The official title of one of the countries whose borders I was trying to define was "the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes", which revealed what a strangely-mixed potion such a nation-state as Yugoslavia could be. As we now

realize, there was much more and much less to so-called Yugoslavia than that.

Now we live with the consequences of these two centuries of western obsession with the nation-state. We have even exported the beast to the former colonies of the European empires in what is sometimes called the developing world. Virtually none of the boundaries of these former colonies have been altered after independence, although seldom did these boundaries have much meaning before Europeans arrived. It is hardly surprising if some of these states seem to have ceased to have any meaningful existence. In Rwanda and Burundi, an arbitrary status division encouraged by the colonial power has been turned into a quite spurious nationality division, so that Tutsi and Hutu extremists battle to wipe each other out to construct a single pure nation state, a lunatic version of the myth of nineteenth century Italy. Even Christian leaders in those unhappy countries have been trained by this madness, and the Church has been split on ethnic lines which take little account of theology.

We must also recognize how often religion has made such situations worse by adding a dimension of antiquity to identities which became national in the nineteenth century model. The problems in Yugoslavia, in the Middle East and in Northern Ireland arise from the association of religion with national identity. They are inherently difficult of compromise precisely because of the religious dimension, especially for those, like Jews, Christians and Muslims, who claim to worship one God. A monotheist can be bilingual; a monotheist can perhaps be binational. But a monotheist cannot be bireligious.

What is worse is that even our modern-day revival of an international commonwealth or respublica, the United Nations, is still shackled to the nation-state as its very name reveals. So was its unhappy predecessor, the significantly-named League of Nations. Behind these organizations are the ghosts of older, universalist ideals quite incompatible with the nation-state: the Roman Empire, the internationalism of civil and canon law, the

individual supreme referee in world disputes. But the brash young nation-state still demands precedence. We have seen the way in which UN operations have been hamstrung over the last few years because it has no coherent power to intervene in the internal affairs of nation-states which have ceased to have any useful meaning for their citizens. The United Nations is only as strong as its member states can make it - and at the moment, even its friends agree, that means weakness and not strength.

Now what can the Christian Church do to help a world which is in turmoil, and whose political institutions are so badly failing? First, to ask this question is to see that it is a question mal posée. There is in practical terms no such thing as the Christian Church, united in belief and purpose: there are churches, still in conflict, split both by ancient feuds and by modern political battles. Christian belief seems almost designed to provoke intellectual or theological conflict because it is constructed on paradox. Built into the very foundation doctrines of the Christian faith are great claims which in human logic seem to clash. God is made human; the Lord of all Power and Might is born helpless in a stable and dies helpless nailed to a gallows. The simple effort to contemplate these cornerstones of Christian faith aright strains human capacity to understand and sends Christians furiously arguing. Indeed the Bible is full of the contradictions of diversity. As a recent scholar has written, the Word of God which is carried by the human voice in the Bible is a polyphony.

In our rapid historical survey, we have watched the Church split into factions based on language, culture and theological disagreements, split between Catholic and Orthodox, Syriac, Copt and Armenian, Roman Catholic and Protestant. We are back to the seeming contradiction of a Christianity which talks of catholicity and oneness, yet which presents to the world the body of Christ divided and broken. "Physician, heal thyself" - that was a taunt which Christ himself said would be leveled against him by skeptics. It is not surprising that it fits his followers well.

There is a phrase now so much used in some Christian circles that it has become a cliché, but that is not to say that it is beyond usefulness. It is that of "the wounded healer". Yes, physicians must heal themselves, but they may inspire more trust in their patients if they have the honesty to admit their own obvious wounds. One of the most heartening features of the twentieth century has been the growth of ecumenism in the Christian Church. The ecumenical movement has had many disappointments, but one cannot expect the wounds of nineteen centuries to be bound up in a single century. One of the achievements of ecumenism has been to release Christian historians from their confessional shackles, to begin examining those ancient wounds afresh. To undertake this effort of examination or reconsideration is to take the past seriously, not to forget it. Remember my Serbian bishop: with his centuries of bitter memories, he cried to me, the Western liberal, "Why do you not understand?" No body is more dangerous for peace than those who say "Forget the past." No one is more helpful than those who say "We must heal the past."

The search for healing in understanding our past will inevitably lead us to finding what is wrong in our own past. I have not spared the Christian Church in this survey of its relations with states. It has betrayed its supposed universality from an early date. It has allied with the powerful, and given sacred legitimation for long periods of time to a whole variety of human institutions, including slavery. Western Christians have tried, and failed, to establish their own universal monarchy on the basis of the bishopric of Rome. You will have noted that the modern nation-state is an outgrowth of Western Christian society, yet this nation-state has now spread throughout the modern world and has put in a claim to being indispensable, whatever the cultural setting. Perhaps it is time for Christian churches to recall nation-states to their origins, and to give them a sense of their own contingency, even their temporary place amid human organization.

At the heart of the process of looking at the past and seeking to heal its wounds is an urge to understand and explain. The disapproving may label this historical cynicism. I would prefer to call it a commitment to humility. Humility is not the same as self-loathing. Christians can acknowledge the Church's many faults and errors in its long history, but in faith they are committed to believing that the Church is still the Body of Christ in the world, and is called to do his work. Imperfect humans will make mistakes, in the service of Christ as well as beyond it. Yet in the Church, the servants of Christ stand in a tradition which can teach historical lessons and offer accumulated experience to the world. The keynote of this advice should be caution and a commitment to exploring the nuances of a situation: a warning against quick, dramatic, extreme solutions to problems. The world is a more dangerous place when religious people have no time for diplomacy, thinking that it spells soft compromise - and the world is a more dangerous place when diplomats have no time for religion except the sort that provides inoffensive options on the periphery of life. Circumstances and temperament have made me more of a diplomat than a zealot, and I am glad of that. Tribalism is a denial of a fundamental principle of Judeo-Christian thought - namely to treat the stranger as one would a members of ones' own group.

One of the wisest of Christian thinkers, Desiderius Erasmus, echoed Aristotle when he said "youth tends to be bold and age to be diffident, because the former is given confidence by inexperience, and the latter acquires diffidence and hesitancy from familiar knowledge of many ills". The Church can claim the prerogative of age to offer advice, not commands, to the world. It can urge thoughtfulness and openness to change. Above all, its founder demands forgiveness as a paramount duty. We have mentioned two other unhappy states in Africa as examples of ethnic nationalism run to poison. It is good to remember that Africa also offers two of the best examples of national reconciliation and healing. In Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, fought his way to power, but then deliberately turned his back on revenge, to break the cycle of civil war which had

wrecked the richness and variety of that country. In South Africa, Nelson Mandela in the hour of victory turned away from the opportunity to settle old scores with oppressors, and has won the gratitude of those who formerly sought to crush their opponents by terror. In neither case has the past been forgotten. It has been faced, and then forgiveness has begun.

The ultimate human act of humility is to apologize. That is the clear-eyed recognition of a wrong done to another: a wound inflicted which will remain a wound until it is acknowledged. This is something which the Christian church in an ecumenical century can offer with a clear conscience to the world as an example. The Western Church has begun, for instance to see the horror of its record in relation to Judaism. Pope John XXIII removed passages about the conversion of the Jews from prayers in the Roman Catholic liturgy, and the present Pope has also spelled out his Church's consciousness of its responsibility for past miseries. Indeed, the pontificate of Pope John Paul II has been notable for its apologies. Here is the successor of the would-be universal monarchs of the Middle Ages, head of a Church which for many still seems over-authoritarian in many of its attitudes; yet he is prepared to admit ancient mistakes. Pope John Paul has sought to make amends for the Church's past attitude to women. He has even issued a statement of regret for the Church's treatment of the great scientist Galileo, one of the worst blunders in Christian history. In Spain, the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy has begun facing up to its role in a civil war which divided Spanish society and brought half a century of hatred and oppression.

Apologies can bring rich fruits. We have seen in Europe the remarkable effect produced by the statesmanlike apologies made by successive German Presidents, von Weizsacker, and Herzog, for German actions in the Second World War. At the root of this series of acts of atonement was the moving sight of that great German statesman, Willy Brandt, kneeling before the Warsaw Ghetto. On the other side of the same conflicts, we have heard President Vaclav Havel express sorrow for the expulsion of

Germans from the Sudetenland in 1945. In this century France, Britain and the United States have twice fought Germany in horrific wars. It is inconceivable that this could happen again. Even where apologies are difficult, the struggle to move towards them can have striking consequences for societies with troubled memories. We witness the current debate in Japan over apologies which might parallel those made by Germany. In Argentina, we see the gradual cracking open of military refusal to acknowledge the horrors of the "dirty war" of a generation ago.

In order to control my material, I have confined myself to focusing largely on the Christian relationships within western international affairs. However, you will already see a much wider relevance that I would need a whole series of lectures to follow up.

The Harvard professor Sam Huntington, in an article written recently, has backed-up my point that religions are to be taken much more seriously as a future source of conflict. The faultlines for human beings now run increasingly, he argues, between civilizations. Among civilizations religion is an inescapable ingredient. He identifies seven main civilizations and points out that the very notion there could be a "universal civilization" is a Western idea, directly at odds with the particularism of most Asian societies and their emphasis on what distinguishes one people from another. He considers the alarming threat of movements that are labeled "fundamentalist". Such movements are found in Western Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, as well as in Islam. The people most active in them are often young, college-educated, middle-class technicians, professionals and business persons. Such elites see old-fashioned religion as their best hope of cement and resistance to Western culture. He may be unduly alarmist but he underscores the importance that I have attached to a greater understanding of basic religious and philosophical assumptions on the part of those who represent modern democrat and free-market societies.

I conclude with a brief summary of the implications of my story for our attitude to international affairs.

It seems to me of great importance that the international community should be a description of the direction in which we would like our international society to develop. Misunderstandings arise when the exercise of power and the application of laws assume that there is in existence a real international community.

The implementation of human rights laws may depend as much on their becoming accommodated to the norms and practices of non-Western societies as on the norms and practices of non-Western societies becoming accommodated to them.

Democracy depends, more than any other form of government, upon skillful leadership, upon the recognition by elites that it is in their interest to transcend nationalism and to be sensitive to the demands and challenges posed by minorities. That is the only way in which problems such as those in Ireland and South Africa can be seriously tackled. The exploration of power sharing has become crucial to those places.

If I were starting out as a young man again, as I was on that Boundary Commission half a century ago, I like to think that I would belong to a local church. We need a cause which is beyond our time-limited world. Not a fundamentalist sect, because for me, the goal of a Christian life is always round the corner, over the hill, beyond the horizon. It is never where we are at the present. There is no perfection in this world. Heaven is our destination. But we do need ideals and we do need identity - who we are and where we have come from.

At the same time I would support and join the United Nations Association. There would be realism in that. A recognition that social and political collisions are inevitable in this life. True realism does not make us despair of doing anything useful in our

fleeing, sparrow-like flight across human history. We can each help turn events in the right direction, and leave this world in better shape than we found it. In that way, we may leave the world one degree closer to St. Paul's vision in his letter to the Galatians.