

## For such a time as this: The call to a deeper solidarity

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*'There is a time to dismantle and a time to build up' (Ecclesiastes 3)*



We are in a time of breaking down, or disorientation, of uncertainty, of not knowing: A time of loss and lament and liminality. Vaccines are rolling out as variants are replicating. Western societies have found themselves vulnerable, uniquely so in modern times, and many within more fragile societies are suffering the terrible consequences of profound economic and political impacts.

It has been a multi-faceted crisis, a poly-pandemic with devastating impacts on livelihoods, health, education; plunging millions of people into malnutrition and extreme poverty, and exacerbating the challenges faced by displaced persons and vulnerable people. Submerged patterns of change and the 'hidden pandemics' – of gender-based violence, mental health, alcoholism and suicide – are coming to light. Economic inequality has deepened, and under the cover of lockdown, the darkness of political repression has been ratcheted up in many countries. Covid-19 has, and will continue to change - *how* we are, *who* we are and how we are *with each other* for years to come.

What lies ahead?

It is a global pandemic: It requires a global solution.

The world is crying out for a renewed vision of global solidarity. As a community of nations, will we build up or fragment? The range of scenarios is wide open: A spirit of international cooperation could take hold. New multilateral solutions may be fostered alongside a digital and green economic recovery. Alternatively, nations may continue to turn inwards, to 'self-isolate', to blame others for their woes. With shrinking global horizons, vaccines will be hoarded; policies of economic protectionism pursued. Or perhaps some nations and regions will recover and prosper, whilst others remain trapped in negative economic and political cycles.

The world is crying out for a renewed vision of global solidarity across borders of identity and nation with new modes of responsibility and justice. For without it, there will be no 'building up'. Solidarity requires vision – and a sense of identity. Yet we live in an age where the Populist politician has been in the ascendent, for whom that vision is grounded in nationalism, in race, in cultural sameness; it involves the conjuring and congealing of identity, spun and embroidered through story-telling and mythology, coloured with nostalgia and imagined pasts; it involves cruel exclusions, discrimination, violence and that

standard political method of populism – the scapegoating of others, ‘not like us’, those with different histories, ethnicities, cultures, languages, religions.

So, what of us? Those whose identity is rooted in the community formed by the Cross and Resurrection, by the example of Jesus, rather than gathering around the idols of identity that reinforce and bolster the sense of who we are through nation, class or caste, or race?

Christians are a deeply political people with a powerful vision of the Church as political community. But it is defined by a very distinctive view of citizenship which radically transcends and challenges dominant political visions. For we are, at heart, exiles and aliens whose true home, whose true allegiance lies elsewhere; whose identity and solidarity is shaped by the death of the self and the renewal of life in Christ.

For, we are by our baptism a transnational and intercultural people, for whom, through Christ, a genuinely worldwide community really is possible. This prophetic vision is beautifully expressed by an unknown Christian, writing in the second century. The author speaks of the fact that Christians are not defined by the place they live or the language they speak or what they wear or what they eat: *‘They live in countries of their own, but simply as sojourners; they share the life of citizens, they endure the lot of foreigners’* (Epistle to Diognetus v). Crucially:

*‘Every foreign country is their homeland, and every homeland is foreign’.*

What if – as Christians, as Anglicans - we actually lived like that? What if we took the context and situation of others so seriously that, on occasion we routinely set the concerns of other nations and cultures alongside our own? How might we articulate a commitment to a renewed global solidarity across borders of identity and nation? Here are four suggestions:

- 1. Recognise Global citizenship as an integral part of discipleship:** If every foreign country were a homeland we would take the claims of other nations seriously: We would hear the cry of the people of Oceania that a 2% increase in global temperatures, however ambitious it may seem, is already too high a price to pay; too devastating; we would ask why the Caribbean nations (CARICOM) seeking reparations for the slave trade prioritise eradicating illiteracy or the treatment of type 2 diabetes.
- 2. Denounce the idolatry of Christian nationalism:** One of the deepest corruptions of faith occurs when Christianity is co-opted and yoked to political visions promoting particular nationalist or racial identities. It is toxic, it is deeply heretical. But it happens, endlessly - as we have seen recently with the ‘capture’ of much US evangelical Christianity by white tribalism
- 3. Interrogate our culture with the mind of Christ:** Most especially where that culture (and politics) has been deeply formed by Christianity, for equally, its Christianity will have been deeply shaped by that culture. For British Christians, that interrogation leads to conversations about the economic and psychological legacies of Empire, about the source of Britain’s wealth and how the ‘Island story’ is told. It involves humility, a commitment to learn and understand, but also to look beneath the

surface – to explore the emotional sources of personal and cultural confidence in the light of our identity in Christ.

**4. Pray, and express solidarity with the witness of Christians, wherever they are.**

Christians in many contexts place themselves in danger by standing against injustice and violence in solidarity with others. For these of our brothers and sisters, prayer and words of support, however small, are not empty gestures but important expressions of fellowship and solidarity.

We stand within a moment of crisis, a time of dismantling, yet also a moment pregnant with opportunity, a Kairos moment. In a world crying out for vision, for a renewed sense of our common humanity, it is the moment to step out, to explore, to build new models of solidarity. For we are called by Christ - for such a time as this.

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