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Armagh file

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DIOCESE OF ARMAGH

DIOCESAN SYNOD 1998

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CONFIDENTIAL

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

To be delivered by the Most Reverend Dr Robin Eames,
Archbishop of Armagh,
in the Synod Hall, Armagh,
on Tuesday 20 October 1998 at 11 a.m.

Members of the Diocesan Synod, I welcome you to this meeting of the Synod and pray that Almighty God will bless and guide all our proceedings today.

CHALLENGE

These are exciting times in which to be a Christian. It is a privilege, a joy and a challenge to bear the name of Jesus Christ and to belong to his church. The Church of Ireland in the Diocese of Armagh is responding in many lively and positive ways to the challenge of Jesus Christ.

In our observance of the Decade of Evangelism we are approaching the climax of our 10 year programme. In September I have just issued a **Call to Commitment** and each parish throughout the entire diocese has been asked to observe a special week either this autumn or in the spring-time to encourage all members of the church to commit their lives to Christ for service in the new century. Next year there will be a **Call to Outreach** when we reach out with Christ's love to the local community, the wider society and the world. We hope to support a diocesan project for the developing world, the work of a Theological College in the Sudan. From

Olinda, Recife on the NE coast of Brazil, a rubbish dump which until recently had been home to many people? A church community is now a source of life and hope for people of the district. Smiling faces and joyful praises are surprising marks of this church at the edge of hell. How can I ever forget the poverty and deprivation, the little children in the orphanages, the wonderful work of the missionary societies? How can I ever forget the loving, generous welcome we were given? All of us are challenged to learn, to care, to pray, to go, to give.

LAMBETH CONFERENCE

For three weeks in July this year I attended the Lambeth Conference in Canterbury. This conference is for all the archbishops and bishops of the Anglican Communion. It is held every 10 years and in an atmosphere of worship and prayer we discussed and debated issues which concern the world-wide church. Lambeth enlarges our vision, makes us realise the size and the variety of the Anglican Communion, and helps us to examine our thinking on such complex themes as world debt, episcopal oversight and human sexuality. I have invited a leading contributor to Lambeth, Dr David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, to attend our Diocesan Clergy Conference in early November. I have also sent to the clergy for parochial study the Archbishop of Canterbury's Pastoral Letter to the Anglican Communion.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Members of Synod, you will have seen already that in our diocesan life together our response to the challenge of Jesus Christ is wide-ranging and many times sacrificial. We need a vision for the future - a vision of the goodness, love and holiness of Almighty God. We need to present that vision to all people everywhere in the name of Jesus Christ.

PERCEPTION

There is one key word which I feel characterises much of what I want to say today in this Address. That word is **Perception** : the impression, meaning or message we convey to others by word or action; the impression, meaning or message we receive when we hear the words, see the actions or gain an impression on the part of others. **Perception ...**

For so many neither our history, our missionary outreach nor our faithful parish ministry is of any account when compared with that word. Across the world the images of Drumcree Church, its spire, its graveyard, its grounds and its parish hall have been portrayed not in terms of St. Patrick, not in terms of Christian ministry, not in terms of missionary outreach - not even in terms of the love of Jesus Christ - they have been portrayed as the scene of violence, sectarianism, mass gatherings and disorder. The world does not see the normal picture of Drumcree Parish Church which we know exists - a picture of Sunday worship, Christian education of children and preparation for Confirmation, pastoral care of the elderly or generous giving to many good causes. That picture is not known. Instead, the very term '*Drumcree*' conjures up images of violence and protest. It instils apprehension across this Province. It represents to the outside world scenes which are far removed from a Christian Gospel of love, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Perception ...

For the past few years the Sunday before the twelfth of July at Drumcree has become a matter of dread. The repeated occurrence of violence at the height of what we call '*the marching season*' at Drumcree has made the parish church a part of tragic folklore. It has become the mecca for confrontation. The ripples have spread throughout Ireland. In this Province allied activities 'in support' of protest have brought community unrest, division, injury and even death. In the rest of Ireland bewilderment, condemnation and frustration have ensued. Within the Church of Ireland it has driven wedges between people. Such is the **perception - and the reality ...**

Since 1807 the Orange Lodges in Portadown have attended morning service at Drumcree. They have been welcomed by the parish and its people. They have had the fellowship of the parish extended to them. Parishioners have identified with the Order and the attendance of the Portadown Lodges at that service has been a customary part of the parish calendar. It is important to understand that this is not a special '*Orange Service*'. As the Rector of Drumcree has pointed out it is a normal Sunday morning service attended by parishioners as well as the Portadown lodges.

It has been suggested by some people that either this service should be banned or members of the Orange Order should not be admitted. This is NOT the way of the Church of Ireland which is a welcoming

A DEFINING MOMENT

But, *Members of the Synod*, condemnation is not enough. We must go further. We must ask searching questions of ourselves and of others.

We in the Church of Ireland have a long and proud record of loyalty to our country and respect for law and order. How tragic it is that the name of one of our parishes now has world wide connotations of disloyalty and lawlessness. We in the Church of Ireland have a long and proud record of service in the security forces. Many members of this diocese have paid the supreme sacrifice at the hands of republican terrorists, because they were members of the RUC, the UDR and now the RIR. It is shameful that abuse, insults, gunfire and bombs are directed against the security forces by so-called '*loyalists*'.

The agony of Drumcree is indeed a defining moment for all of us in the Church and in society at large. It has become a cameo of the worst agonies of Northern Ireland.

APPEALS

Before the Portadown Lodges attended the service on 5 July a letter was sent to them in the name of the Archbishop, the Dean, the Archdeacon and the Rural Deans, reminding the members of the Christian responsibilities attached to attendance at divine worship and urging them to act peaceably and within the law. **No reply was received to that letter.** During the protest I made several personal appeals for the protest to end. In that I was joined by individuals, Churches and civic groups. From within the Order also voices were raised appealing for an end. In the days following the 5 July service and since I have asked on several occasions for the protest to end. Again a letter was sent on behalf of this diocese asking for its termination. **Again no reply was received.** The Portadown Lodges chose to ignore all of those appeals - and the protest has continued. Efforts to gain some local accommodation have failed. No direct dialogue has been possible in this sad situation. Within Portadown violence has threatened lives and business premises and there have been sectarian attacks on shops owned by Roman Catholics. The business community has suffered great damage. Despite repeated statements on behalf of the Orange Order appealing for peaceful protest, tensions have been raised which are devastating normal life in that area. I want to pay a special tribute in this regard to the clergy working in Portadown for their pastoral care and integrity.

SPEAKING TO ORANGE ORDER MEMBERS

I want to speak directly to Church of Ireland members of the Orange Order at this time, particularly those in our diocese. I do so in a pastoral sense as Archbishop and I ask you to accept my sincerity.

I know and respect so many of you. We have often talked together on matters of mutual concern. Many of you play important roles in your parishes and worship there each Sunday. You see loyalty to Church and Order as serious matters of daily life. You take your Christian belief seriously. Many of you are asking deep questions at this time. I worry when I read general criticisms of the Order and think of what I know of you as people. I know your feelings at present. I know your concerns. I know that while so many of you deplore the violence in your heart of hearts you believe your rights are being denied. You feel that at present **your** community has given, given, given and that there must be a line in the sand. While you deplore violence you honestly believe that Protestantism is being attacked from many sides. Like me you have so many vivid memories of the past 30 years of the Troubles. I have buried relatives of many of you who have been murdered. I have ministered to you and your families often in times of unbelievable distress. You find it hard to accept a great deal of the Peace Process. You want peace - but you want the security that your beliefs and way of life will be protected in the future. But there are right ways and wrong ways to express a point of view...

GARVAGHY ROAD

Every effort was made up to the last minute to gain agreement about a return route. The Church as well as government, political and other agencies were involved. I believe agreement was possible. I believe agreement could have been reached. But I have to say that the Garvagh Road Residents Coalition was equally determined in its respective position. It was acting to a strategy carefully-prepared and well-planned over several years. *Intransigence* is the word the media use frequently. A gesture from the Garvagh Road group could have broken the deadlock. A gesture from the lodges could have had the same result. It takes two sides to make an agreement. But I cannot help feeling that a gesture from either could have led to success.

- the avoidance of any action before or after the service which diminishes the sanctity of that worship.
- obedience to the law of the land before and after the service.
- respect for the integrity of the Church of Ireland by word and action and the avoidance of the use of all church property or its environs in any civil protest following the service.

I uphold the right to march. I uphold the right to protest. I uphold the right to attend church. But these must be done peaceably and within the law.

The Church of Ireland teaches respect for what we commonly call '*law and order*'. Despite deep feelings about the Parades Commission on the part of the Orange Order, its decisions have the weight of law. The way to revise this position, if desired, is by a change in the law through parliament or eventually through the Assembly. That is democracy. Until then **the law is the law**. We cannot be personally selective in our attitude to the law, no matter what our personal feelings may be.

Those three pledges I have requested are the ingredients of what I believe to be a '*Christian welcome*' to anyone. Our churches are open for worship. But we have a duty to respect and **put before everything else the sacred things of God**.

I look forward to continuing my discussions with the Portadown lodges and with others in the Order simply because a way must be found, a solution must be found and in the name of God, in the name of all the people of this Province, a way **will** be found to solve Drumcree. I say again as I have said often in the past : I offer the services of the office I hold to do anything I can under God to solve this problem. But my bottom line is :

1. What makes for peace in our land;
2. The integrity of the Church of Ireland.

It is all too easy to dismiss everything said on behalf of one community as propaganda, but until the general apprehensions of communities are taken seriously stability will not be easy.

THE CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

Members of Synod, what we are talking about at this moment is of prime importance for the whole community. It is a grave issue. It is a problem to which, though we might wish it to be otherwise, there are no simple and easy answers. Let me assure the many critical voices we have heard recently that if there had been simplistic answers they would have been addressed a long time ago. But we are talking about these issues as a Christian Church which is part of the community and made up of ordinary people seeking the will of God for their lives. Therefore we must place our questions in the Christian context. This means we must think of words such as *healing, prophecy, forgiveness, reconciliation, prayer, love and discipleship*. Those words make huge demands on us. Those words call us back to Christian basics. Above and beyond any human agency seeking a solution to Drumcree is what we must call *the Christian dimension, the Christian attitude*. In a phrase : *What is the will of Christ?*

A NEW INITIATIVE

In the name of Jesus Christ I am willing to make a fresh attempt to find healing and reconciliation. My most senior diocesan colleagues and myself will shortly issue an invitation to the Rector and Select Vestry of Drumcree Parish Church, representatives of the Orange Order and of the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition to meet us separately or collectively to discuss the situation afresh. If desired, we can later include representatives of the wider Church of Ireland or other interested parties. We are willing to listen. We are willing to try again to help to find healing and peace.

HEALING AND FORGIVENESS

There must be healing at Drumcree. There must be forgiveness at Drumcree. There must be reconciliation at Drumcree. When I think of my own personal agony and indeed torment over the pain, the suspicion and the deep, deep emotions in many hearts concerning all we associate with the hill of Drumcree and the Garvaghy Road I have prayed

The movement to peace is slowly but surely marginalising Drumcree. It is pushing aside old animosities and feelings. But the pace of peace must never reach the point where genuine principles, genuine apprehensions are ignored.

NEW CONFIDENCE NEEDED

What Northern Ireland needs above all else at present is a new sense of purpose and direction and a confidence that the real feelings of each community will find an equal place, equal respect and equal treatment in the years to come. Here the government must play its part by ensuring equality for all. But within the Protestant community there has to be a new recognition of the dangers of allowing the statement of its ideals to become one of violence, negative protest, verbal intimidation and intransigence. It must find a positive, realistic, courageous and confident means of expressing its views. **Whether they realise it or not a fragmented and weakened unionist community lacking in self-confidence would not be welcomed by nationalists.** Both communities have their regrets as well as their fears. Both communities have their hopes. Those aspirations do not need the force nor the threat of arms to ensure survival. They must turn their back on that negative past.

It is important to realise the significance of all that has happened in Northern Ireland in a relatively short period of time. The speed of events after years of violence and division has been breathtaking to say the least of it. Now it is a question for most people of catching up with events, understanding their significance and addressing attitudes which are needed if we are all to move forward. During those long years of *'the troubles'* we could not afford the luxury of thinking what the real cost of peace would be. We were numbed by the misery and loss. Now quite suddenly we have to readjust - not just to the chance of peace, but to the reality of peace. Basic to that process is the fact that attitudes are just as important as actions. Trust has been the real casualty for so long. **Now trust must be built up. Unionists must be able to trust nationalist, nationalists must be able to trust unionists. Republicans must come to understand more clearly what makes unionists the people they are and vice versa.**

MR RICHARD McCONNELL

Sadly, this will be the last Diocesan Synod when Mr Richard McConnell will be present as Diocesan Secretary. He has, as you know, announced that he will retire next February. For so many years we have taken his professionalism, his kindness and his expertise almost for granted. No problem was too small for his full attention. No query was dismissed as irrelevant. His endless courtesy and co-operation have been so appreciated by us all in this diocese. We will miss him in the office, at committees and in all those ways he has found to make the business-side of our lives move smoothly. I know you will all join me in thanking him and wishing him and his wife many years of happiness in his retirement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Once again I thank Mrs Montgomery for all her work in the Diocesan Office during the past year. I do not think we fully appreciate the amount of administration she deals with so efficiently and with such care on our behalf day by day.

I know you will all join me in thanking Mrs Roberta Haffey for her understanding and support as my Secretary. I have never known her to be down-hearted or frustrated no matter how much pressure you or I place upon her. Her cheerfulness and her deep Christian faith have inspired me over the years. You only see a small part of the work she undertakes. As the 'phone and public face of the Primacy Roberta enjoys the immense affection and respect of countless people in the diocese, in Ireland and across the world. I thank her this morning for simply being 'Roberta' to us all ...

End.