



# "Reconciliation is not an event; it is a process taking generations"

01.10.2024 | Justin Welby

## **Speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the International Meeting for Peace, Paris, 22nd September 2024.**

Mr President of the Republic, Madame Mayor of Paris, Permanent Secretary, Eminences, Chief Rabbi, Your Beatitudes, Your Graces, Heads of different Religions, Dear Guests, President and members of Sant'Egidio, brothers and sisters with whom we seek peace:

Let us start with repeated thanks to Sant'Egidio in their work on peacebuilding. Through decade after decade, they have worked in areas of conflict. They saw remarkable success in Mozambique.

They continue to work in many other places, faithfully despite repeated discouragement. They centre their efforts in repeated prayer, in prayer which draws many who are without faith to find the love of God in Jesus Christ.

They seek to live lives that reflect the heart of the Christian good news, by welcoming the stranger, caring for the alien, protecting the vulnerable. In their continued growth and determination, they reveal the love of God.

Jesus invites us to open ourselves to the love of God. For this reason Christians find themselves together praying and acting for peace. In 2023, in an unforeseeable moment, I went with the Holy Father and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland to South Sudan on a pilgrimage of peace.

The most known part of Sant'Egidio's public work is in the prayer for peace. It is a moment of ecumenical and interfaith hospitality which inspire all who observe, including me, with the certainty that there is hope and courage in a world that is "becoming unhinged", to quote the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) in his extraordinary and prophetic opening address to the General Assembly a year ago.

To the members of Sant'Egidio, thank you. You are the bearers of hope.

The UN estimates that there are roughly 56 conflicts in the world. The war in Ukraine is the largest full-scale war in mainland Europe since 1945. The situation on the battlefield remains precarious. Rightly, the western powers have supported Ukraine. Russia's great strength in numbers is a constant factor on the battlefield, and in my visits to Kyiv and Odessa I have seen the exhaustion, courage and resilience of the people of Ukraine.

In the Middle East, the immense horror of 7th October last year gave rise to deep sympathy for the State of Israel, and also gave rise to a renewed outpouring of European antisemitism as well as Islamophobia – and there is no place for either in our societies.

As soon as November last year a student son of a friend, observing a protest against the intense agony of Palestinians in Gaza, heard some of the demonstrators chanting "there is only one

solution". In Europe that is a call for extinction of Jews, not only those in Israel. We can also find people calling for the extinction of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. We cry out to God against such sins and horrors. The one common feature is the death of the innocent and the increase of fear, insecurity and hatred.

Immigration creates fears in some communities. In almost all of this continent, communities in some areas feel a sense that their nation has changed and will change more, and those fears have been encouraged and exploited by some politicians, which has a corrosive effect on the ties that bind our societies.

Then there is one war which is camouflaged behind the more obvious ones. It is the human war against the creation. It is undeclared, but active, in every sense a hot war. And it is a war that breeds other wars.

The easiest way of missing the target of a maximum global average temperature increase of 1.5 Celsius is to have conventional wars.

Ask the soldier on the battlefield about climate change. The soldier will answer "the climate in 2050? I will be glad to survive 20 minutes."

So how does prayer help?

First because in prayer we demonstrate that there is an eternal hope and light that no darkness can overcome. In prayer we take all our anxieties to God and lay them before His eternal throne and presence.

The creator of all things has seen the star systems emerge from the primitive dust. God has watched the mountains rise, the sun and the stars burst into life. God has seen Empires come and go, has raised up heroes and saints. God is neither threatened nor perturbed, neither anxious nor confused.

Christians believe that in grace and love he himself came as the son to live, to die unjustly, to be raised from the dead, to ascend and to give us His Holy Spirit who sustains every beat of our hearts, every revolution of the planets, every hope of forgiveness, every will to pardon sin, and renew and redeem and reconcile the creation.

Second, prayer puts us in tune with the will of God. That will is a will to peace, to the common good, to love and hope. It turns us from seeking power or using other people as less than ends in themselves. It is God's will that we should be partners with him in reconciliation.

Thirdly, prayer inspires imagination, imagination to tackle our human propensity to invite chaos and destruction into God's ordered creation. Created in the image of God we possess the will of God to be curious, to be present in suffering and to gloriously re-imagine a better world in the realms of climate control, political breakdown, community hostility, and racial and ethnic prejudice.

Reconciliation is not an event; it is a process taking generations. In 1945, Europe was a hopeless and bankrupt slaughterhouse of hatred and cruelty. Today, there are huge struggles, but the only place we ever truly express rivalry and hunger for victory is on the football field. And France is remarkably successful.

Reconciliation requires human participation. It happens through the brilliance of leadership, de Gasperi, Adenauer, Monnet, Schumann, de Gaulle, Churchill, General Marshall. Defying the bloodshed of the past, it beats swords into ploughshares. Reconciliation means history that is true. It means healing past hurts and admitting wrongs.

Reconciliation is not only agreement, although agreement is necessary; reconciliation is the transformation of destructive conflict into creative rivalry underpinned by mutual acceptance and love. It is a cycle of peace, justice, and mercy, building up a structure shining in the love of God. A moment of peace opens the way to truth telling. Truth telling sows the seeds of relationships. They allow a gram more of peace. In this thin soil of peace, justice can be sown. Amidst justice a fragile confidence appears. From confidence the next and better circle can begin.

But the foundation of it all is prayer, for in prayer we commit ourselves to partnership with God. There we find hope; there we see change; there we are drawn together. May God direct and inspire us.

Source: [Sant'Egidio](#), International Meeting for Peace, September 22, 2024.