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CHURCH OF IRELAND

GENERAL SYNOD 2003

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

**The Most Reverend Dr Robin Eames
Archbishop of Armagh
Primate of all Ireland**

***The Conference Centre
Stillorgan Park Hotel, Dublin***

13 May 2003

WELCOME

Members of the General Synod and distinguished visitors, I welcome you and pray that Almighty God will bless and guide us as we transact the business of the General Synod allocated to our trusteeship.

ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN:

In the name of the General Synod I welcome the Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Reverend John Neill. On a personal level the Archbishop and I have worked as close colleagues for many years and I welcome him to his new responsibilities and leadership within our Church and the wider community of the Southern Province. As he returns to a diocese in which he and his late father exercised pastoral ministry he brings to his task the wide experience gained through faithful episcopal ministry in the west and south east. His worth has already been recognised through his Presidency of the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland. How appropriate it is that he is to be honoured with an honorary Doctorate by the National University of Ireland in Galway. We wish Archbishop John and Betty every blessing in the future.

BISHOP OF CASHEL AND OSSORY:

I ask the Synod to join me in welcoming the Right Reverend Peter Barrett as Bishop of Cashel and Ossory. We welcome him and his wife Anne to their new home and responsibilities and wish them God's richest blessing in the years to come.

THEME : POWER AND POWERLESSNESS

I have chosen two words as the theme for this year's Presidential Address : **POWER** and **POWERLESSNESS**.

I want to suggest that during the past year both globally and locally events have forced a new urgency to a Christian consideration of the nature of **power** and its consequences for those who experience

powerlessness. Let us remember those terms point us back to the Gospel imperative.

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

In the past few months the world has been confronted with all the horrors of modern warfare in Iraq chiefly through the immediacy of media reporting. Let all of us realise that no part of the global village will be able to absent itself from the consequences of what has happened. For generations to come the significance of this war will continue to influence our lives. But the moral implications for the global village stretch far beyond the debates on that war.

What is clear beyond any doubt is that a **new world order** has been born. That order faces issues of deep moral significance. It is about the nature of power and powerlessness.....

As I have said before war is the ultimate tragedy and the ultimate failure. Human life continues to be an expendable commodity and pawn in the clash of ideologies, the exercise of power and the settling of international disputes. Powerlessness is an immense ingredient in human relationships. It is just as significant as power itself.

We have prayed for the Global Village - a village which faces such an unknown future. For Christian, Jew, Moslem and unbeliever this is their village. These are their dilemmas. These are their questions. It is all too easy from the comfort and safety of arm-chair, pulpit or sanctuary to form judgments on these issues. But the conscience of our global village demands that we do have opinions – and that we make those opinions heard.

There is one way in the new world order that the injustices and inequalities of our world can be addressed. Theories about a '*just war*' have not stood the test of history. I for one am convinced that those who wage war **whatever the justification** carry the equal responsibility to engage in humanitarian action which accepts the realities of compassion, support and outreach to what Scripture calls '*the poor of the world.*' The new world order which confronts us must now encompass a new dimension of responsibility – and that

responsibility is about human need. No longer is it sufficient for nations to react to world tragedy **once it happens**. No longer is it sufficient for nations to appeal for voluntary aid **after** tragedy ruins lives.

Members of the United Nations have already agreed that the so-called developed countries should allocate a minimum of 0.7 percent of their GNP to aid for developing countries. Ireland is one of those countries which have agreed to do that. However it is one thing to make the pledge – it is a different thing to fulfill that undertaking. Ireland set a deadline of 2004 to achieve that goal but in the last budget the deadline was extended. Britain has so far managed to reach 0.34 per cent which is less than half of what was agreed. The United States has reached a mere 0.19 per cent.

Members of Synod, those tiny fractions represent very large sums of money and we must remember the billions of dollars in aid so many nations have contributed. However when those figures are compared with the gigantic sums **received from the developing world** in the form of loan repayments to the IMF and the World Bank it becomes apparent that there is hardly any aid at all. To put it plainly, the money traffic in world terms is one way – from the poorest to the richest. Original loans have been repaid ten times over in the form of interest.

Surely the human conscience of the Christian heart calls out as never before for **a new structure of government** which makes a much more obvious provision for the removal of poverty and need not as a consequence of war or world tragedy – **but as a constant, accepted and integral part of fiscal national planning**.

This Church has shown its compassion through support for the Bishops' Appeal for World Aid and Development. Should not the Church of Ireland **now** make a clear call on the governments of Britain and Ireland to devote a definite and realistic percentage of national wealth to world development as **a constant and normal element** of national expenditure. Controversial it may be – but is not a logical consequence of individual responsibility in this '*new order*' that direct taxation should reflect a permanent contribution to national aid for the poor of the world? That percentage should be relevant to

the needs of the global village bearing in mind the economic stability of the nations – and the moral responsibility to alleviate the poverty of this world. It is about the use of national wealth ...

While I acknowledge that the British and Irish governments have made efforts in this direction I believe much more is necessary – **and necessary not as a special effort**, but as a regular and accepted part of the national budget. The links between poverty and under-development to terrorism and dictatorship are clear. Surely the nations of the First World have a new moral responsibility to reach out in this practical way to the needs of other parts of the same global village – **and the time to respond is now.**

POWER AND POWERLESS IN THE MARKET PLACE

Members of Synod, our global village this morning is becoming aware of another immense scenario in which power and powerlessness are prime considerations. This is the growing debate on **sustainability of the world** God has given us.

That debate has already focused attention on the ethical and moral dimensions involved in the natural environment, but is about much more. It is about the political realities of power in a world divided between those who have and those who have not. That debate involves questions of global justice, reverence for creation and resistance to the marketisation of a society like ours in Ireland. The Christian must surely be prepared to use the language of morality when confronted by that of money and ‘what works’ in purely commercial terms.

The sustainable agenda reminds us that there are moral issues in the stewardship of the earth’s resources. But it also talks about self restraint in consumption, the need to care for others, concern for the poor and for ultimate ends. For Churches the sustainable agenda provides an opportunity for translating the core message of the Gospel into terms that are relevant to modern society. **When we talk of such things society listens. When we address such issues secular society takes notice. It seems plain that the Church is**

one of the last social places we have which can be resistant to materialism.

In Ireland this debate focuses on the consequences of consumerism and wealth distribution involved in the Celtic Tiger society. Indications of economic decline in our society make such as the sick, the poor and immigrants so vulnerable. We see unemployment in Ireland where powerful international conglomerates sacrifice men and women without genuine regard for their condition, where market place forces dictate and influence life-styles which plunge thousands into uncontrollable debt and where the power of media advertising introduces a new generation of young people to values which cannot be sustainable in the long term. It produces moral dimensions to how, where and why housing estates are built. It questions the golden hand-shake to some where a direct consequence of the policies they have initiated have brought human need to others. It asks about what the level of payments or transfer fees to professional footballers says about community values to young people. It asks about the amounts we spend on armament compared with health programmes. As Tribunal hearings in this city have reminded us human greed and self-advancement have many forms.

Such an agenda asks of the Church serious questions about what message it has for the world – and how it communicates that message. As the failure of technology and market-led approaches to ecological and global problems such as human inequalities grows **so the call for a deep spiritual and ethical vision will grow. This is a powerful agenda. This is an agenda no Church can ignore ...**

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Recent events in the peace process in Northern Ireland again remind us of the interlocking relationship of power and powerlessness.

Despite strenuous efforts it has proved impossible to restore devolved government to the Province. Those efforts continue but we are told that insufficient trust and clarity exist to re-establish power-sharing institutions. This failure is undoubtedly a set-back to the political element of the long road to peace and stability. It has

produced a dangerous vacuum. But it is and must be only a setback. There is no doubt that the vast majority of people want to see and deserve genuine stability.

Members of Synod, political progress and structures of government are a vital part of the peace process – **but they are only a part of it.** When public attention is focused on politics and structures we tend to think the entire process depends on politics alone. Structures can and must be a vital part of the process. But the real power, the real strength and the real ability to build a just and peaceful society rests with people. It rests with people in their lives, in their homes, in their work, in their relationships and in their attitudes. That is where the real power lies. They may have their political and religious expressions but they have the power to change and influence a community.

Within everyday northern society we see power and powerlessness manifested clearly and in profound ways. **We see the consequences in working-class areas of years of social deprivation and neglect.** In both nationalist and unionist areas a failure by political power to address social need has produced an environment of alienation, community need and the atmosphere in which paramilitary organisations have flourished. That heritage of political neglect is tragic and has contributed largely to the despair and desperation clergy encounter in working-class areas today. I have listened to the words coming from those areas, I have met delegations and community groups and their message has been one of powerlessness. Local amenities for recreation, local amenities for community service, unemployment, lack of facilities for young people, failure to provide adequate health care facilities, inadequate provision for the elderly – the list goes on and on. We are now seeing the alienation from traditional political structures on the part of **many who feel a lack of relevance for their lives in high-level political dialogue.**

There is no doubt that thirty years of community violence has produced levels of distrust across Northern Ireland. Sectarianism continues to corrode and blight the Province. **There is naked sectarianism on the streets but there is also benign sectarianism far beyond inter-face areas.**

We still see the corrosive power of certain organisations to threaten lives as the recent failed attempts to bomb the centre of Belfast and Dublin illustrate. We may have moved beyond the constant, weekly atrocities – but the power of **threat** remains. Yet society is not completely powerless in this respect. Society **has** shown it wants to turn its back on ‘*those dark days*’ of the past. But the corridor of fear remains where paramilitaries engage in drug trafficking, protection rackets and punishment beatings. In Northern Ireland too we can talk about a ‘*new order*’. That new order is about local bridge-building, hands of friendship unimagined a few years ago, new local community initiatives and a new awareness of the power of individual and collective memories. In all these examples Churches are playing a vital and faithful role. Behind the headlines which so often concentrate on division there is an unstoppable movement for a ‘*new social order*’. Dare we say people power is taking on a new dimension?

But the reality is that the forces for status quo, the urging to hold on to old and failed ways and a reluctance to take steps forward in faith remain a significant element of powerlessness to embrace or welcome change.

For the Protestant/Unionist population there is an urgent need to find a new confidence. Events have eroded that self-confidence. They must be allowed to move away from the ‘*siege mentality*’ – and others can help them by their attitudes, pronouncements and actions to do so. **While they demand clarity of others’ intentions** they need to recognise how far Irish Nationalism and Republicanism **have** moved.

For the Roman Catholic Nationalist/Republican community there is a need to recognise that there are no longer ‘*second-class citizens*’. There is a need for them to recognise that genuine goodwill does exist in much of the Protestant community which like theirs has made mistakes in the past.

For both communities there must be a new definition of **power**. **That definition must be a complete and lasting renunciation of the power of violence**. That definition must apply equally to loyalist as well as republican paramilitaries. That definition must be a new and lasting **trust** – otherwise we will continue to say farewell to young

people of talent and move together into a wasteland of social decay and a society of despair.

Real power in Northern Ireland has to become the power trust alone can provide ...

The Report presented to us entitled '*The Hard Gospel*' is one of the most significant documents in the long history of the Church of Ireland. We acknowledge the support of the International Fund for Ireland in its production and in particular its Chairman, Mr William McCarter. As a Church we have begun a profound and extensive examination of sectarianism within our structures and within our attitudes. We will find a great deal to make us all feel uncomfortable as a Church. We must recognise failure, we must address attitudes and we must recognise that this is **not** a problem which only causes riots or murders or which is confined to concerns for our Church in the north only. It speaks to our Church in the Republic. Too often comments on northern issues from the Republic and comments from the north on issues in the south have themselves disclosed sectarian mind-sets. The comfortable pew, the pulpit, the sanctuary, the youth club, the Select Vestry, the training of clergy, the relationships with other Churches – every aspect of the Church of Ireland must be a part of the process we have begun. Eighty per cent of parishes have responded to the work which has produced this Report. That figure in itself is remarkable. We have begun a process. May God grant we will recognise the power to change and to respond to the call of '*the hard Gospel*'. We are not powerless – we must seek the power to change beginning with ourselves. **Only then will we truly become the agency of redemption which is so desperately needed.**

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

But this Report reminds us that there is more to diversity than political or religious sectarianism.

Time and again we recall that this Church of Ireland is a diverse body. We encompass two jurisdictions, differing cultural outlooks and greatly varying social conditions. Those differences exist in this General Synod. The sensitivities of how power to influence is

exercised in this Church and in its structures must be an ever-present concern. In our pastoral concerns for each other our structures must be the servant of the ethos we have inherited – not the master.

Power to influence our policies in pastoral ministry involves the nature of authority. We are an episcopal Church and this Synod is the supreme law-making body which includes clergy and laity. The exercise of authority is about the nature of power. The recent Summit on Ministry has reminded us of the ever-changing nature of pastoral demands on both clergy and laity.

One area mentioned in the study is that of sexuality. Issues surrounding sexuality in general and same gender relationships in particular have been on the agenda of the House of Bishops for many years. In the period of preparation for the Lambeth Conference of 1998, the House of Bishops entered into a prayerful and critical study of homosexuality and invited both theologians and experts in ethics, some of homosexual orientation, to address us. In all these discussions we were made increasingly aware of the variety of responses to these issues among church members.

The Lambeth Conference of 1998 brought this issue to the fore in public debate in the Anglican Communion. Next week I will attend the meeting of Anglican Primates in Brazil where this issue will be high on our Agenda.

Across the past year your Bishops have felt that the time has come to engage in this discussion at a deeper level in the Church of Ireland. We are aware of the fact that this is a very crucial issue for some people, either because they have particular views that they wish to advance, or because they are issues that they face in their daily lives. For the latter, there has been much hurt in that they have felt that the Church of Ireland, let alone the wider Church, has been neither understanding nor accepting of them.

While individual bishops hold differing views and we recognise there are parts of our Church where these issues are of greater importance than in others, yet in our loyalty to Scripture, tradition and pastoral concern we have found a real **deepening** of mutual trust

and fellowship in open discussion that has not led simply to a common mind on this issue.

As bishops we are conscious that we must identify key issues and basic principles that cannot be ignored and provide a way for the Church of Ireland to engage in this vital discussion without it becoming what some have called '*a Church-dividing issue*'. We hope to complete a paper which will be offered to the Church of Ireland to discuss at different levels and to pray about, in the belief that we may be led as a Church to make wise and compassionate decisions deeply rooted in the faith of Jesus Christ which we profess.

Power and authority must be exercised with genuine sensitivities to the feelings of others. That is why the bishops feel this is the best way forward for the Church of Ireland in this issue.

STAFF:

I know we would all wish to acknowledge the work of the Chief Officer, Mr Denis Reardon and the Representative Church Body staff who have had a particularly heavy work-load during the past year. As we will learn in considering the RB Report the rapid fluctuations in world markets have called for constant vigilance in our business affairs. In that respect a word of gratitude to our Accountant, Mr Adrian Clements and the Head of Investments, Mr Philip Talbot.

In the past year Mrs Janet Maxwell has taken over responsibility for General Synod business and in partnership with Mr Derek Philips has carried the onerous tasks of preparing for this meeting. In acknowledging our debt to them may we thank all our staff at Church House, Dublin, for their help in organising this unique institution the General Synod.

The Reverend Brian Parker, the Church of Ireland Press Officer, has provided our Church with quiet, efficient and expert support in so many ways. I know from personal experience how much the media in both jurisdictions appreciate his work.

REAL POWER

I said at the beginning of this Address that power and powerlessness take us back to the Gospel imperative. That imperative must be the centre of our work as a Synod as it must be the centre of our life as a Church. We face serious issues in making the Church relevant to the lives of people in Ireland. We have questions for ourselves and for society.

But my prayer is that while we recognise the true meaning of what they thought was the apparent powerlessness of the Christ of Good Friday we must move forward with the real power of the Christ of Easter morning ...

(The End)