

# Peace and resources for peacebuilding in Christianity

## Transcript

Rt Revd Dr Rowan Williams

Thank you very much indeed. It's a great pleasure to be back at one of these OXPs events. This is not the first time I'll be here, thanks to this. I'm aware that time is short, so I'll try to condense what I want to say as much as possible and begin with one of the obvious critical and difficult points in the Christian legacy and thinking about peace. And that is the fact that apparently Jesus of Matter has said two completely contradictory things on the subject. I have not come to bring peace, but a silver, he said in one of the Gospels. And in another, he says, I leave you peace. My peace I give you. Not as the world gives, will I give you. Is this as much of a contradiction as it sounds? The true problem is in that not as the world gives. It seems that what Jesus wants to say about his admission, his expectations of his followers, is that the kind of peace which he believes his own presence and work achieves is not the kind of peace that we are habitually used to. And that means that that kind of peace may be in conflict, in short conflict, with what others think about peace. Now, I think we can take it for granted that he builds upon the way in which peace is imagined in the Jewish tradition of which he's apart. A piece which, as we were reminded earlier, is essentially a matter of relation, positive and active relation, not the absence of conflict. It's been said so often, it's put about a Tisha, that the Hebrew shalom does not mean the absence of conflict, but an active, a constructive interconnection. between agents and realities. And so it's not surprising that when we come to slightly later elements in the early Christian tradition, we hear a great deal about interaction, interdependence, and about the kind of peace that we can characterize as constructive and creative mutual relatedness. A state of peace is not a state where there is no tension, no conflict, the condition in which all involved are contributing to one another in certain way, building up one another, making one another more alive, more free, more capable of continuing to contribute to the circulation of life, relationship and well-being. The catch in this vision, this wonderful global vision, is of course that people change. That's to say, if you're thinking in terms of active mutual relationship, you're speaking very much in terms of which we were reminded earlier of people's free choices. A mobile, an insecular, an unstable world, which is the world we live in as human ages. Which means that the peace we are left with one of these in the Christian tradition, is a peace which has to be constantly alert to and responsive to changing conditions, changing confidence, the complex reality of other people. Peace serves mostly, it would be very simple if other people were not there. It seems to me that one of the fundamental insights of Christianity is arguably, the challenge to cope with the fact that other people are not going away. With any conflict, with any attempted resolution of conflict, with, dare I say, any election, I come

from Wales, where I've had a question today, we have come to terms of the fact that after an apparent decision or resolution has been made, Those who have lost the argument are not going obligingly to die. How do we live with that in any way other than freezing, canonizing, sacrificing absolute oppositions? I'm struck by the fact that some years ago I was involved in the work of the Constitutional Commission of the Welsh Government, and we submitted our first interim draft to the Welsh government, one of the first questions we were asked by the then First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, was, how does a constitutional settlement cater for losers' consent? That's to say, any ongoing, forward-looking, peace-making, peace-building, political environment, how do you offer the loser a stake in the survival of the settlement. It's why I wanted very much, indeed, to the language of a good enough piece that we have on. And just to add another footnote of gratitude for Gillian Rose's legacy here, and to mention this moment. When you offer the user a stake, that will mean a kind of formational process in society, which accustoms people to examining, interrogating, and indeed, with a blunt discipline, their assumption that their need is about to be given, and that another's need is unreal, even wicked. I can create a culture in which a degree of stepping aside from the self-evidence of your own rightness and your own right is no longer a default setting. So that's to move us away from theology, I see. And yet, if we believe that peace is essentially a matter of what I've called constructive mutual relatives, And if that can only be real, if it has buy-in for more than just a local public, then the New Testament vision, and indeed its roots and brands of new prescription, seem to be saying to us that in not an ideal, but a desirable, we are involved in repeated, peaceable negotiation with one another, in which it would be possible for us to say a majority vote is not a metaphysical reality, but another fact in an ongoing process of managing relationship for the maximal good and the minimal fear of all those involved. And that's the vision which I see in the Christian scripture as distantly, but not the less powerfully, in forming a politics of hopeful peacebuilding. Just to comment more directly on some of the issues that are being raised already today, I want to make two or three comments which arise part of the perspective under Spartan and might have something to say to the practicalities of the future of the UN and other peacebuilding associations. The first has to do with the word security, a word which is ambivalent to the extent that it's frequently used as the banner under which I fight against someone. During the COVID pandemic, we got used to the slogan, no one is safe unless everyone is safe. It's quite difficult to translate that into international or interstate. And it seems to me that that is what security is bound to me. I am secure not when my neighbour is secure. If I believe my security is only to be guaranteed when my neighbour is maximally in secure, I have a common and the world has a role. So, first point, how do we reimagine security? How do we reimagine the Security Council is here to become something other in our minds than simply my guaranteed well-being at the expense of necessary of everyone else's well-being. Which connects a little bit with what was said earlier about the role of mediation in the Security Council and other agencies of the UN.

How does the UN invest more fully, more imaginatively, and more durably in mediation. We've heard a little bit about the varieties of operation and vocum to new revolutions. Mediation is in some sense a part of that. It certainly does depend on the consent of host governments. It depends also on, I think, a notion of security as necessarily a negotiated and always a renegotiable matter with the mayor we find threatening. So, the evidence of security, that's one point I want to know. So is the challenge which I think we face at the moment, which I call the erosion of ethics. And that by meaning that we're not confronted simply with the collapse of the international border, etc. We're faced with a growing collapse in the ethics of public life and the ethics of conflict. We've been reminded already this point that the protocols around the conduct of conflict are not only effectual, but seriously outdated. We lack any protocols around armed drones. That collapse of ethics or the apparent unconcern with which the obliteration of entire civilizations is threatened. That goes alongside what I've already hinted at in my first point about security, with what you might call the erosion of politics. You might say that the problem is not that the UNM is a political body, but it is not political enough. If politics is about negotiation, if politics is about the interrogation of trade and security of all that means, if politics is about learning to sideline the assumption that my right is absolute, then what is the forum within, not only the UN, but any number of national and international communities? What's the forum in which politics can actually be conducted? The third point, arising from some of the discussions this morning, has to do, I would say, with the paradox that at a time when we are more than ever conscious of the interlocking nature of the crises in the embrace faces, we are investing less energy, imagination, practical results. in those ways in which we can learn to act collaboratively. I like to say sometimes that crises don't really map. Pandemics don't present their passports at national borders. And the crises that occur on the other side of the world apparently have immediate measurable impact in various ways we might not have expected. Paul Rogers told us in the first session this morning, something about the interlocking nature of these crises, reminding us too that the environmental crisis impacts immediately on other areas, including economics, as climate-related migrancy grows a major source of potential conflict and potential stop in the next generation, if not already now. But I believe in the last few weeks we've seen another illustration of this. As we've been reminded that the conflict in Belize, the conflict between Iran and the U.S. is not only about the supply of fuel for motor vehicles, it's also about a whole range of petroleum-related products, including fertilizes. The blockages in the stated formers affect what can be grown in Milan. Very often we are not global enough in our perspective in this respect. We don't register properly and effectively enough. Our crises here create and worsen crises there. So in all these ways, we are moving, it seems, unless we are compared to quite a bit of thinking about moving towards a world in which constructive mutual relatedness becomes less and less possible as people retreat into the cores in the room, fail to make the connections, fail to understand the interdependence of the law. crises and

challenges fail to interrogate their own absolute scheme of their rights and their claims. A vital stop, John, very briefly this morning that is worth pondering, is the connection between how states behave and how persons understand themselves. And before finishing, I'd just like to come back to that point and underline it. Jesus says, I've not come to any peace with a sword in the sense that we are all of us liable to feel the sharp edge of challenge in any vision that tells us that our own account of our rights, freedoms and claims is not answered. It will hurt. It hurts as we grow ethically as individuals, as our freedom develops into something more than just a liberty of self-association. It hurts the communities. It hurts the states and countries. And the question of the crisis is not can we find a hurt-free and cost-free world, but can we find and can we create a world in which we are at least delivered from some levels of fear by the knowledge that the hurt and the cost are shared, and that we have local and global communities in which hurt and cost can also be held or healed. The very existence of the imaginations tells us that is something we long for. How hard we long for it and how serious our longing is, I suppose, fundamentally the challenge that faces us as we look back on 80 years and forward to how many years my endless. And that's why I'm here today has been an opportunity to bring together some of these granular issues about the future of the UN and some of those larger vision-related questions that we might want to bring to learn on that future. I see that So that's all.