

Student Cross Jubilee – 13 September 2008

'We who are many are one'

Address by Chris Bain, Director of CAFOD

Good morning, I'm Chris Bain and I walked Student Cross in the mid-70s as an undergraduate at Leicester University. It set me up as a life-long serial pilgrim – first setting up a cross walk with the Catholic youth of Fiji, then walking Northern Cross for a decade, and now one of the organisers of Scottish Cross, taking mountain and loch side trails to reach Iona.

Following a variety of roles at Christian Aid, VSO and Oxfam, I'm now Director of CAFOD.

This means an annual cross pilgrimage has been part of my life. I have been nourished by the kind of spiritual formation that parishes are not always able to offer. I have looked forward every year to that cocktail of the physical, the beautiful, the spiritual and the social; and to that heady mix of the sacred and the secular.

And like all of us, I've experienced it on different levels.

Its quite natural that on some basic level, Student Cross and other Cross walks are just plain earthy fun and physical pleasure – even if the heights of hedonism consists of the immoderate number of pints consumed. I shudder when I look back – how did I down that quantity at lunchtime and still walk 11 miles with my full pack! Sadly, the same pleasure today is obtained by looking forward to Scottish cooked breakfast on the ferry between Oban and Mull.

On a social level, I relished being thrown together with fellow pilgrims in all their diversity, and the profound conversations that followed. Some of these exchanges were quite personal and confidential – faith examined, vocations explored, marriages decided on, grief and memories shared.

My life-changing decision to do VSO – and thus a career in international development - was made during my last Student Cross walk.

On a spiritual level, I kept, and keep, space for reflection. Absorbing as much as I can of the Week's wonderful liturgies and stations.

But whatever the searching, exploring, experiencing, during the Holy Week pilgrimage, the focus on our physical and spiritual needs, our one to one relationships, our joy of community, our experience of God present, we knew we would always end the week by looking beyond the walk – our Easter message was to go out into the world.

Because, from that joyful and highly charged moment when we finish the Easter Vigil and are filled with the spirit of the Resurrection we are charged with returning to our communities, and families, and parishes, and workplaces. We are sent back into the world, the real world, which is messy, complex, challenging. For some of us this world is exhilarating and fascinating; for others, insecure and uncertain. For some it is hopeful and fulfilling, for others, desperate and dangerous.

Seen this way, our pilgrimage is - and was - a preparation for our launch back to the world we came from. And this made all those quiet conversations and passionate arguments about our society, or the state of the world, and the church, have meanings and consequences we may only realise years later. I now recognise that the encounters with ideas I had walking Student Cross were some of my most formative at university.

We may not have used the term, but we were reading and debating are the signs of the times in the world of our day.

Church teaching recognises all too well how we need to understand and interpret the world around us; how we need to interpret the signs of the times so our actions, attitudes and behaviours can be not just consistent with God's will but relevant to the needs and challenges of our time.

So the key point of my brief talk this morning is to share a glimpse of the world today as I see it – 60 years after that first walk. And inevitably it's broad and possibly a bit quirky. But I conclude that the different challenges and circumstances today, informed by church teaching, require a radical approach in the way we live our lives. The question is am I ready for such radical change? Are we?

Filled with the Easter spirit, listening to the call to transform ourselves and our society, what are the signs of the times in the world today?

Those first SX pilgrims in 1948 were I'm told ex-service people whose education was interrupted. They'd experienced the horrors of war so perhaps they were talking about a new dawn of exciting change: a new health service giving treatment free at the point of delivery, Beveridge reforms providing a safety net for the most disadvantaged; as well as a crumbling empire, or the Berlin Airlift, or indeed the London Olympics. In the 50s I can imagine the conversations being about Suez or the cold war? Or the new queen? The early 60s must have yielded fascinating conversations - the Second Vatican Council, or the Cuban missile crisis or Kennedy's death in '63. Were the walkers in 1967 still talking about the world Cup win the previous summer or looking forward to the greatest free concert Britain's ever had – the Rolling Stones in Hyde Park. And of course, 1967 also gave us the most significant encyclical – *Populorum Progressio* – but to be honest it seemed to have passed most Catholics and Christians by. The one that didn't came a year later – *Humanae Vitae*. We were still debating this when I walked in the 1970s. and indeed its legacy is being debated today.

Still, when I walked in the mid-70s the world seemed a much simpler place. The Vietnam War had ended and the cold war was pretty much a proxy one fought out in remote third world countries. We were still concerned about Apartheid in S Africa, or Northern Ireland, or whether to join the EEC, as it was called then. Apart from some students and some of those Christian people, concerns about the third world and world poverty was an esoteric issue. It was 24th on the list of general election issues of 1979. And those concerned about the environment or climate change – well they were just academics or loonies.

As for those of you who walked after 1979, well you had Reagan and Thatcher and the miners' strike, and the Falklands and in 1989 the fall of the Berlin Wall which is when political history ended for 12 years and we talked about technology, Microsoft, the Web, Microsoft, Apple, Microsoft, HIV, and so on.

So what is different now? Why is reading today's signs so critical and necessary? I'll give an answer in three parts and I'm sure you can add more in your groups later.

Part 1 is an emerging desire to see a bigger picture – away from our baggage and preconceptions.

For much of the past 40 years we have been caught up in the battle of the 'isms' – and their avatars, the 'ists'. And they were intolerant of each other.

As a developmentist I poo-pooed the environmentalists and for years had a cartoon on my wall parodying the WWF logo saying "Why save pandas, they're smelly, violent stupid animals – save humans instead." Environmentalists thought there were too many people and development should be about population control. A feminist friend detested communists because they perpetuated machismo and male dominance. We all hated capitalists - particularly because with Reaganism, Thatcherism, and the fall of the Berlin Wall, it really looked like they were winning. As I've just alluded to, one of them even said history had now ended, no more battles of ideas, no other ism's worth talking about except capitalism. Wonder what Fukiyama now writes about 9/11, Enron, Northern Rock, Bear Sterns, sub-prime collapse, credit crunch, Fanny Mae and Freddy Mac.

We in the church have not avoided wrapping church teaching around man-made ideological constructs; all the isms have their learned theological books showing why God supports them. I believe one of the shortcomings of Liberation Theology is its wholesale embrace of Marxism which has meant that with some exceptions like Sobrino and Gutierrez it's not been easy to translate into the 21st century and fresher signs of the times.

Truth is, we were warned 40 years ago that you cannot see the world's problems in isolation or from the perspective of the isms. Populorum Progressio, yes way back in 1967, said we needed a holistic approach to development and world politics – indeed to life generally. That it was not just about economics or politics, but about the growth – culturally, socially and spiritually – of people, as individuals and as part of communities. Pope Paul had a vision of the global village as we see it today, and recognised our God-given world was finite and needed nurture. He called this authentic development. The picture was big, broad, and prophetic with a clear message for our times, let alone 40 years ago.

Part 2 of what is different can be sifted from some broad brush stroke of global facts – as a CAFOD person they come from a particular perspective, but do add yours in the buzz groups.

6bn people live on this earth, and we can no longer use the terms developed and developing world, let alone third world.

1 bn are in absolute poverty on less than a dollar a day; let's call them low income and they own 2% of global wealth. The top 1bn – which we're part of own 75% of the world's wealth so let's call them high income. The remaining 2/3, mostly in LAT Am and Asia, are now middle income with most of their people earning between one and \$50 a day and what is striking is that most of them have developed significantly in the past 20 years and are still growing. Without doubt, economic and political power is moving East - by 2020 China will have the largest economy, India will be third behind US and together they will have a third of the world's pop'n.

Of the key global issues, conflict will be significant. There are about 36 conflicts in the world today - mostly within states – with over \$1 trillion on military spending. Causes of war will include resource scarcity = of oil, food and water and critically land and its natural resources. Food and energy are the immediate manifestations – I'm just back from Uganda – which has been doing quite well recently but its people have seen a 40% rise in fuel costs and a staggering 60% rise in basic starchy foods. All this is exacerbated by global population rising to 9.2 bn by 2050. 95% of this growth will be in low and middle income countries. The African population to double to 1.4bn by 2050 over 60% global pop'n in cities.

Today , 32m living with HIV, 900m no access to healthcare and 1bn illiterate. 30,000 people dying each day from preventable diseases, poor water, malnutrition, and AIDS. Now about 12m refugees and 22m IDPs.

Amid all the stats on environmental destruction, nothing has hit home as much today as the issue of climate change, a cause of 3 times as many disasters than 30 years ago impacting over 250m in the past 3 years. IPCC predict worsening situation with dryer, and wetter, areas. Without doubt, climate change is impacting on poor people most . And while there are debates about the mix of causes, the overwhelming body of evidence points to the need to reduce CO2 emissions. They say unless we reduce carbon emissions by 2020 by 50% temperatures will rise by over 2° C and this will be catastrophic. Developed countries need an 80% reduction carbon emissions to do this.

Finally, the development practitioners at last recognise that we cannot talk about development in low income countries unless you understand the faith dimension. The proportion of people attached to the world's four biggest religions – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism – rose from 67% in 1900 to 73% in 2005 and may reach 80% by 2050. Catholicism is growing in low and middle income countries and declining in the North

What is different Part 3

Well, I think people are in a different place, and looking for new insights on how to live fuller lives today. I don't think this is wishful optimism just something that keeps recurring in conversations and think pieces and they relate to 2 other isms I haven't mentioned yet : globalism, or globalization, and consumerism. Very few of us can say we are not affected by these and feel somewhat uncomfortable about their excesses.

The late Holy Father, John Paul II, left us with some deep insights into economic and cultural globalisation. He saw a process that *can* create unprecedented wealth and global common good actually foster an ever-widening gap between the rich and poor countries and between rich and poor people. He saw a globalised world where the current structures of trade and finance, of commerce and capital, are today impoverishing millions of people, especially in Africa, but prophetically, also us in the north.

So Pope John Paul on many occasions called for Global solidarity to transform systems and structures that don't serve life or the common good. He could not accept that a fifth of humanity lives in abject poverty; nor could he accept the injustices at a global or local level which keep them in their poverty. But he also called each of us to transform ourselves. Meaningful solidarity is about a fundamental change in the way we relate to each other, and in particular about how we relate to the poor and disadvantaged. It recognises the interdependence of people – do unto others as you would have them do unto you – but goes further – it demands compassion – the sharing of suffering, sharing of resources, the preserving of life. Our model, he says, is the person of Christ and how he related to people. I hope this is recognised by CAFOD in the way we work and the approaches we take to our work.

This theme was explored beautifully 40 years later in Pope Benedict's first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. "Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form one single Commandment."

If Pope John Paul rooted solidarity in the search for justice, Pope Benedict reminds us that love and charity are central to Christian faith and are at the heart of tackling poverty and injustice.

It is this love – personified in Jesus – that demands that everyone has the right to the fullness of life and basic human dignity; and rages against the exploitation and disempowerment of the world's vulnerable and marginalised. This is not a pastel-shaded love but vivid, something powerful and awesome; it's the source of our solidarity, our hope, and our thirst for justice. It's a love that burns in our hearts, and inspires us to act.

And many of us in this room have acted. You have shown solidarity and compassion. You have supported financially the work of CAFOD, and Christian Aid, and Tearfund, and the secular agencies like Oxfam.

You would have supported people like Catherine who I met a few weeks ago in Uganda. Give story....

And you have listened to the call of CAFOD's partners and other voices from the South that in all their gratitude, consistently tell us that solidarity means we have to do more. More, that is, here in the UK. More because we sit at the top table – at the G8, in the UN and as part of the EU. More because we are part of a consumer society in the rich north that feeds off the commodities and minerals of the south and generates 80% of the carbon gases.

More because the poverty faced by xxx it is man made and need not happen. The poverty that kills 30,000 people a day from preventable diseases, poor water, malnutrition, and AIDS is not inevitable, it can be prevented. 30,000 people a day – that's equivalent to a disaster on the scale of the Tsunami - every week.

Many of you have taken action through campaigns by CAFOD and other agencies. Campaigning not only raises issues and acts on them, it brings thousands of people together and creates political will to change policies and practices for the better. I suspect many of you were part of the debt campaigns over the past 15 years which has led to the cancellation of the debts of the poorest countries. Make Poverty History called for more aid and trade justice and the achievement of the millennium development Goals and led to a potential doubling of aid over the next 5 years. Then trade element is still work in progress and I'm sure we'll all be working together to see the aid really does flow, and flows effectively.

But the limitation on campaigning is that it transfers the responsibility to others – governments, businesses, multilateral agencies. Sure we try to tackle some of the big global issues and structural injustice, but I wonder if it let us as **individuals** off the hook a bit? How many people got the impression that all the structural changes would be cost-free? Did it challenge us as individuals to look at our lives and our personal impact on poverty and the environment?

And here we can turn, once again to PP for guidance – remember it said it is 'everyone's responsibility to contribute to making a fairer world' and this required a personal transformation, if necessary. And its not cost-free.

This challenge is the basis for what we are calling the LS challenge.

If we were to try to distil what we are called to do by the gospels and CST, we could say something like:

God calls us to create a world in which human dignity is respected and everyone can reach their full potential. A world where development creates the fertile soil for peace. A world where love underpins justice. To do this we are called to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor.

The Livesimply challenge brings together over 60 catholic organisations and dioceses from all over E and W. It's a challenge to the Catholic community and the wider general public to take personal responsibility for creating change, for creating a world in which human dignity is respected, and for understanding the impact our way of life is having on poor people and the environment.

It's a challenge to ourselves as individuals. We are empowered and have to take responsibility. It recognises that much about the world we live in is wonderful, beautiful, rich and satisfying, but much is wrong, unjust, or exploitative.

We have tried to read the signs of the times today. As I've illustrated earlier, more than any other time in history, we're living in a more polarised world with many parts of Africa having lower living standards than 20 years ago. Our value systems are distorted and confusing with extreme libertarianism adopting an anything-goes attitude and an extreme totalitarianism preaching intolerance and hate. Our environments are on the road to total degradation, natural resources becoming depleted, and our climate seems to change daily. The development of poorer countries is blocked by the hurdles of HIV and AIDS, corruption and bad governments – and now rocketing food and fuel prices.

Markets and economies are increasingly globalised together with information that's instant and uncontrollable. And we now have a battle royal between intolerant secularists and people of faith. Above all we're reaping the consequences of the failure to heed the warning about greed and consumerism in Pop Prog 40 years ago.

For the lucky ones, like me, well. My supermarket gives me 40 brands of shampoo to choose from, eight different varieties of potato, 25 kinds of bread, and 12 types of chicken, for goodness sake. We have a new iPod or Xbox coming out every month, 99p flights to Barcelona, 150 channels on cable, and wonderfully conditioned real ale is served while you wait at the checkout. Well I lied about the last one so you can see my weakness...

Given the context, the challenge of LS is to take power, to take responsibility. It asks us to pause, reflect, pray, and act.

It means reflecting carefully on how our choices in life might affect those living in poverty. the fifth of humanity living on less than a dollar a day, cannot bounce back from environmental setbacks as easily as those who have plenty and are often those most affected by environmental degradation and climate change.

It means considering how much is enough, and to live sustainably - to appreciate the beauty of the earth, the glory of creation and to breathe with it rather than against it.

It means resisting the pressures on us to conform to media-driven consumption patterns and self-obsessed lifestyles, to being counter cultural and non-conformist and going against the flow.

It means sometimes getting passionate, angry about a child dying every 3 seconds from a preventable disease? Or about more and more carbon choking our atmosphere. Or billions being spent on arms and armies and nuclear deterrence.

Crucially, LS is a celebratory call to action in which God calls on us to be different, to speak out, and to be a living symbol to the world that an alternative way of life is possible and necessary. Underpinning this call to action is a deep spirituality. The whole of the live simply challenge speaks of our relationship with God and with our neighbour as we see the face of Christ on all who need us both now and in the future. It needs to be part of our prayer life, calling on the Holy Spirit for strength, and reflecting on how God is calling us to live more simply and in solidarity with the poor.

In my final few minutes, I want to get a little personal. I've worked for charities in international development all my adult life. I've met at first-hand many people who have been living in extreme poverty or suffering injustice. I've understood the global economics which have impoverished people and seen first-hand the unequal power relationships, between men and women, between tribal groups, between the rich and poor that perpetuate that impoverishment. I dedicated my life to this work to the best of my ability. Throughout my working, adult life I've had my crises of faith, but overall my belief has been a reassuring constant.

Yet I have found my reflections on the live simply challenge very difficult. It seemed to make sense to me when it was a bit of theory, a bit of theology, aspirational. But I too am a child of my times. I like my creature comforts even if when I'm travelling for CAFOD I make do without them. I've got my fair share of gadgets. I like to visit interesting places have taken advantage of cheap flights. I like my wine, my ale, my single malt, and my car. And, as for good food – well you can see for yourself!

And yet underneath it all I know that to take the LS challenge seriously, I will have to adjust the way I live and the way I consume. So here is a bit of advice I'm giving to myself and sharing with you.

Firstly, its okay to be incremental and take things a step of the time and do lots of little things. Mother Theresa once said that she knew her work was a drop in the ocean but that the ocean was made up of many drops. I am always inspired by CAFOD's supporters in the parishes who year on year organize the Lent and harvest Fast and promote our campaigns, The little adds up to a lot.

And I think that by doing these little things we start to think and talk and reflect - and when we are ready to make some big decisions, for example to sell the second car (or in my case my touring motor bike), to use the train for travel in Britain and Northern Europe, to commit even more of your money and time voluntarily, they become easier to make, and gladly made. I see the LS challenge for me as a process of change.

Second, we can not take this challenge by ourselves. We need to act in community, with our families, amongst friends, within our parishes and wider church and human community. This is why LS is not just an initiative of CAFOD, or J and P. or Housing Justice, or Pax Christi, or a single parish or diocese, or indeed a single denomination. Its about all of us working together and sharing the highs

and lows, the successes and failures. Part of the package is the call to make promises, public promises, which others can witness and join in. The essence of pilgrimage is simplicity and solidarity – what if all the current cross walks took up the challenge in the coming years and joined the LS network and encouraged their pilgrims, fired by that Easter spirit to take it into their local church and the wider world?

The issues behind LS are not going to go away.

Third, I'm going to have to start turning some attitudes of mine on their head. If I see live simply is just about giving up things, living frugally for its own sake, stopping doing things I want to do, missing out on a good meal, and so on, I'm simply going to be miserable and terrible to be around! These play to my weaknesses rather than my strengths. I want my decisions to be made because I believe I have enough and want to share what I've got. I want them to be about my generosity with my God-given time and money. I'm reminded of the parable of loaves and fishes, which is the symbol of live simply, where Jesus was told by his apostles to send the crowds away hungry, but Jesus said no, we must feed them, and one child's meagre offering became a feast for thousands.

Finally, well yes, we can take things one at a time, we can seek the support of others, we can turn self-denial on its head and talk about generosity. But in the end, taking the LS challenge seriously, to live simply, sustainably, and in solidarity with the poor requires a conversion and the change of heart: turning away from all habits that trap us in bad behaviour, and resisting the powerful forces of materialism, consumerism, and wealth - and our own weaknesses and vulnerabilities. And boy, do I know about those. This is why LS has to be about our spiritual journey, too, as we see the face of Christ on all who need us both now and in the future. I know for me that if I am to rise to this challenge I cannot do it on my own.....

I will be a pilgrim seeking help on my journey, starting with transforming my prayer life, calling on the Holy Spirit for strength, trying to deepen my relationship with God and reflecting on how God is calling me to live more simply and in solidarity with the poor.

Let me conclude. Our Student Cross pilgrimage was a profound preparation for going back into the world with all its joys and possibilities and challenges. Reading the signs of the times, today's challenges, in the light of our faith, call us to action. We are called to go out and share Christ's message of Christian justice and love so that it is at the very centre of each parish, of each school, university chaplaincy, prayer group or lay community. Where we all recognise we are part of the problem because of what we eat, what we wear, how we travel, – but can be transformed into part of the solution because we understand this and make choices and take action and work together. We are called to work towards a world which Isaiah describes as a banquet to which all are invited. Not a few crumbs from the left-overs, but a feast. Let me quote Populorum Progressio: '(We are called to) 'build a human community where people can live truly human lives, free from discrimination on account of race, religion or nationality, free from servitude to others or to natural forces which they cannot yet control satisfactorily. It involves building a human community where liberty is not an idle word, where the needy Lazarus can sit down with the rich man at the same banquet table.' (PP, #47)

This is the LS challenge to us all. Let's take it up together.

Thank you.

Chris Bain
10 September 2008