‘Doctor Livingstone, I presume?’ was one of the very memorable phrases people still had on their lips when I was growing up. In the age of explorers, David Livingstone was among the greatest, and when Henry Morton Stanley set up his expedition to report on Livingstone in 1871 for his newspaper the New York Herald – a sensationalist publication akin perhaps to *The Star* today, he got his big headline with that question. Obviously, a century later, it still resonated!

Livingstone had in fact been getting quietly on with his work of finding areas European explorers had never seen, and also bringing what he saw as civilisation to the people he met on the way. Amidst all the present furore over colonial attitudes and slavery, it is worth focusing for a moment on the heritage Livingstone left behind.

In fact, he opened the way for the work of the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), a socially enlightened offshoot of the High Church Oxford movement, who shared with Livingstone a passion for the abolition of slavery and the bringing of literacy and modern hygiene – along with self-determination – alongside the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments.

It is no accident that to this day the tribes in Mozambique and Malaŵi around the shores of what is now called Lake Malaŵi or Lake Niassa are over 90% Anglican Christians. In fact, Livingstone and the UMCA missionaries were the first outsiders they had encountered who did not want to enslave them. Incursions from the Zulu and other dominant Bantu tribes always took place with the enslavement of the native Nyanja and Chewa tribes in mind; when Arab traders had brought Islam that far inland following their coastal raids, that came alongside slavery as well; and the Portuguese, with their faith expressed in a language not even the Portuguese fully understood, were also mostly interested

in slavery and exploitation. The UMCA missionaries are remembered and honoured for their entirely Christian approach which brought with them for the first time a sense of shared human dignity before God.

When I first visited that area in 2003, much of the civilisation established at that time had been knocked right back by the attrition of 25 years of colonial and civil wars, so that life for many seemed like it had retreated into the Iron Age. But even then, it had been the Church which held society together (largely through the work of women – the Mothers' Union having a major role in this), and it was to be the Church which initiated, sponsored, and encouraged the work of recovery, restoring clean water sources, halving peri-natal mortality, working together with people of good will, Islamic agencies included in areas nearer the sea coast, to develop literacy programmes – and much else. All, of course, accompanied by the amazing singing and dancing, in the midst of the incense, the bells and the solemn liturgy.

If you read most contemporary accounts of the missionary work associated with European empire-building, you will be forgiven for thinking that it had nothing but destructive effects on local cultures and people. I tell the story of Livingstone and of all that followed to illustrate that it was not that way everywhere.

Like the periods of the Church's history I have talked about in the previous three addresses, there is so much that could be said, and with little time to say it, the best thing is to offer a little colour to help understand the background. This week I am going to be even more focused, and on just a few things – largely Anglican, largely British – so that I can offer a sound base for the thoughts I intend to offer next week on the direction for the Church to take in the future.

Among the various pictures and drawings of this parish church, there is the inevitable one of the nave turned into what is best described as a 'preaching box'. The period following the death of the first Queen Elizabeth was a stormy one for the Church of England as the Puritans, and others who felt too much of the medieval tradition had been retained, agitated to return to what they saw as a more ancient and purer form of religion and society. The periods of the Commonwealth and the Restoration saw swings between different styles of religion and of society, with yet again the things held most dear by either side being desecrated, and a series of martyrs and exiles, not least of course featuring the execution of Charles I in 1649.

The 18th century saw a more settled period of sorts, where most churches took the form of the preaching box, chancels and altars were largely ignored and neglected, and services were dominated by very lengthy preaching. The Church of England in a way survived by becoming very boring indeed so that it was no longer a political threat, though as Catholics will still happily tell you, they and other 'non-conformists' were still disadvantaged and ostracised. It is not least due to the tedious nature of this state religion that movements like the Methodists arose, looking for what Wesley described as a 'strange warming' and a more inspiring (though definitely not shorter) style of preaching.

In many places independent chapels rose around the missionary work of travelling preachers. One such – Edmund Jones the Tranch – created a chapel in 1740 in a place called Cwmffrwdoer which I lived next-door to for some years. The contemporary accounts have hundreds of people coming from all across the then scattered local communities as he travelled around preaching, and his revival was one of the more noted among many. Though most accounts say his

preaching was very dull, there was certainly something about the man to create such extreme excitement (or maybe the preaching in local churches was duller still?).

From the early 19th century on, things changed quite rapidly. Movements arose within the Church of England to increase participation and active faith. Many of today's biggest association football clubs were founded by churches to keep young men off the streets, as the longer working week gave way to a longer weekend, and to get them to go to church on the Sundays, rather than spending all weekend drinking. This sort of 'muscular Christianity' contrasted with the more intellectual and Catholic Oxford Movement, which sought to restore some of the pre-Reformation practices and doctrinal interpretations, especially of the sacraments, and which, maybe counter-intuitively, but with great effect, founded parish churches in the slum areas of the great cities, bringing both social and eternal hope and joy where there had been none.

At the same time, it became more acceptable to challenge the very basis of the Christian faith. Both theologians and the proponents of the developing physical sciences battled for supremacy, as the experience of scientists was at odds with interpretations of biblical narrative as plain fact. Notorious assertions such as that of Archbishop Ussher: that the Bible dated creation at 4,004 BC, became subject to challenge. The Cornishman John Colenso was so challenged by his work among the Zulus and other tribes in Natal (and incidentally so loved for engaging with the challenges) that he proposed new way of interpreting the biblical narratives, which led to the Church of England (as its still was in South Africa at the time) trying to find ways of shutting him up, especially when the

Privy Council, on being asked to enable the Church to act legally against Colenso, declined to do so.

The first Lambeth Conference was convened in an attempt to find a way through the schism in South Africa caused at least in part by Colenso's biblical teaching, and probably also by resentment at his public advocacy for native Africans in Natal who were repressively treated by the colonial regime. Many bishops refused to go to the Conference, stating that no one had any business telling them what to do or teach in their own dioceses, and objecting to any central teaching or control over what was still then the Church of England in most of the British Isles and most of the Empire. The Bishop of Saint David's, Connop Thirlwall, whose teaching had met with similar opposition to that of Colenso, said memorably, when the gathered bishops were asked to describe themselves: 'My desire would be simply to take out all mention of what we are. What the Bishops of the Church of England hold, or do not hold, is a strange thing to define in the year 1867. I think it would be very mischievous if such a gathering as this attempted to come to any understanding of such a nature'.

Of course, they – and successive Lambeth Conferences – did make many such attempts, both at teaching and also at trying to define what Anglican all over the world should hold true, especially as the Church of England gave way to independent Anglican provinces throughout the 20th century. However, there was one lasting contribution to the endeavour to indicate what an Anglican actually is.

At the Lambeth Conference of 1888 a four-point definition was adopted, offering the same sort of simple requirement first found in the biblical Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15.23-29). This was an adaptation of a so-called Quadrilateral

proposed in Chicago at the 1886 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, and it was hoped that this would be not only a totem of unity for Anglicans, but an instrument whereby all Christians might acknowledge their unity in one faith.

The statement was that the Bishops believed in:

> The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary to salvation and as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith;
>
> The Apostles' Creed as the Baptismal Symbol, and the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith;
>
> The two Sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution, and the elements ordained by him;
>
> The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of this Church.

Next week, when I intend to offer some thoughts as to the future of the Church, I will also offer some comments on the growth and role of the Church in the 20th century, so rather than prolong this address I will go straight to suggesting just one thing we might well learn from the above:

The Church is at its best when it is actively about Christ's work rather than worrying about the unity of its organisation or whether this or that member of the Church (or indeed Church leader) believes exactly the same as I (or we) do.

And I'll end with words traditionally ascribed to Saint David, of whom Connop Thirlwall, whom I quoted earlier, was of course the successor:

Lords, brothers and sisters, Be joyful, and keep your faith and your creed, and do the little things that you have seen me do and heard about. And as for me, I will walk the path that our fathers have trod before us.

PC, 30th March 2025