

ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW



SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS
SERMON PREACHED BY HIS EMINENCE THOMAS J. CARDINAL WINNING
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS CENTENARY CELEBRATION
ST. GILES CATHEDRAL, EDINBURGH

How inspirational was the title of the Polish Trade Union - Solidarity.

The turmoil of history in the wake of the Industrial Revolution threw up last century what came to be known as 'the worker question' or 'the proletariat question'. The matter brought about an immense shoulder-to-shoulder surge of workers as they closed ranks in a great burst of solidarity. It was a natural reaction against the degradation of human beings in the work arena, and against the accompanying exploitation of the worker in the field of wages, working conditions and social security.

Indignation at the indignity, you might say. After all we believe that a human being is made by the Creator in his own image and likeness.

We humans matter more than any other of God's creatures. Our destiny transcends anything this world has to offer. God has guaranteed our dignity and our future.

That is why we say all paths in the Church lead to the creatures we know as man and woman. It is **the** way for the Church's daily life and experience, for its mission and toil, and the Church of today must be aware in an always new up to the minute manner of what women and men are experiencing here and now.

The Church must be aware too of the potential; it must be aware of the threats to human beings and of all that seems to oppose the endeavours to make human life ever more human, and to make every dimension of this life correspond to our own dignity.

It was this that made Jesus choose one particular passage from the Old Testament to illustrate in a graphic way his mission and its objectives: his very first sermon in his home synagogue at Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

Total salvation for God's people: bodily, spiritual, individual, social. That text must resonate with every Trade Unionist, Christian or not.

We are on the same wavelength as Jesus.

Making all that happen is the role of the Christian and anyone - believer or not - who subscribes to this programme is a builder of the kingdom of God.

The fact that the STUC has requested this divine service in St Giles is a measure of your acknowledgement of God's help and encouragement.

You know the story of the past hundred years. There is no area, no corner of life in Scotland that has not been improved by and made more human through the endeavours of your Movement, from the struggles of the Highland crofters to the campaign for a Scottish Parliament.

The statement of the STUC President at the first Congress in Glasgow in 1897 now has a prophetic ring: "we believe that if we want anything well done, we have got to do it ourselves."

How do we see the future?

It is a privilege to live at this time as we look forward to a new century and a new millennium made all the more exciting because decisions about a new Scotland and a new Europe are being debated here and now.

Here are some ground rules to reflect on as we try to find consensus in our society on the way ahead:

- ***Human dignity can be realised and protected only in community. We belong together. We must work together, collaborate for the good of all. All discrimination has to be outlawed.***
- ***All people have a right to participate in the prosperity of society. Unemployment is a plague; an evil. It deprives a person of his dignity and his right to a decent living.***
- ***All members of society have a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable.***
- ***When I was hungry you gave me to eat, sick or in prison, a stranger...you gave me a home...***
- ***When you did it to the least of these brothers and sisters You did it to me.***
- ***We are challenged by all that is good and wholesome within us to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenceless, to assess life styles, policies, salaries and all social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor and vulnerable.***
- ***Human rights are the minimum conditions for human living. All have a right to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, education, employment. We must ensure they are enjoyed by everyone in our world.***

The STUC has fought a good fight. When others were not concerned, you were.

I wish to remember today those men and women no longer with us who by their words, example and action made Scotland a better place to live in.

No utopia is possible on this earth, but with God's help we can continue to transform and improve the world in which we live.