NAIROBI DIVINE CONFERENCE 2012
Archbishop Eliud Wabukala – Opening Keynote Address
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Will you not revive us again? Ps. 85:6

My dear brothers and sisters, I welcome you today in the precious name of the Lord Jesus, the one who gives the living water of the Holy Spirit to the thirsty. We are gathered here in expectation, to pray and wait upon the Lord as the first believers did in the days before Pentecost.

We come today with many cares and concerns, for our Church and nation and in our personal lives, but the burden of my heart for these few days we have set aside is that the passionate cry of Psalms 85:6 becomes ours too ‘Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you’. The whole Psalm is the sustained plea of people who long to rejoice again in that reviving and restoring presence of God which they once knew. This is our most fundamental need too. We who are so easily weighed down by worries and anxieties need to rediscover the enjoyment of God’s presence. The hallmark of genuine revival is a deep joy worked in us by the Holy Spirit, not something we work up by our human effort. It is the sovereign movement of God’s Holy Spirit, yet before it is manifest, there is always heartfelt repentance and expectant prayer.

This must be so, because the ultimate aim of revival is that God should be glorified. In this sense revival is always restoration because the point of the whole creation, and male and female within it, was that it should all resound to the glory of God. All our idolatries, crude or subtle, must be jettisoned. Revival is not about Christians being more prosperous or the church being seen to be powerful and successful. These things may result from revival, but they are not at its heart. The point is the glory of God. Later in this wonderful Psalm, the Psalmist prays ‘that glory may dwell in our land’ (v9). The first step in revival is that God and his glory become the passion of our lives again. Think of Daniel and Nehemiah, men who longed to see the ruins of Jerusalem and the Temple restored after the exile to Babylon.
They were not preoccupied with their own comfort and safety, nor did they pray out of mere nostalgia and sentimentality. They were driven by a holy indignation and an unquenchable desire to see God glorified. So for example Daniel prays ‘For your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary which is desolate’ (Daniel 9:17).

I want us to be clear about this God-centred nature of true revival right at the beginning of our time together because it helps us to avoid two common mistakes which in their different ways can lead us to quench the Spirit of God.

The first is this – the mistaken belief that we can organise a revival. Genuine revival is God’s initiative and God’s work; it is not something we can just decide will happen. It will not come about by new programmes, by adopting more modern and enthusiastic forms of worship or by relying on leaders who have natural charisma. So this Divine Conference will not make revival happen, but what we can and must do is humble ourselves and allow God to take us into that first and essential step of repentance. In this way, we allow God by his Spirit to search us and expose those areas of hardness of heart, of unbelief and idolatry which can render so much well intentioned work ineffective.

The positive truth to hold on to is that for the Psalmist, as in the whole of Scripture, there is a profound and inescapable link between repentance and blessing. ‘God’ we are told in verse 1 ‘restored the fortunes of Jacob’, but that is immediately followed by the statement in verse 2 that ‘You forgave the iniquity of your people’. Daniel expresses the same truth as he prays for the restoration of Jerusalem when he says ‘To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws which he set before us’ (9:9).

Notice how Daniel recognises the form this rebellion has taken - ‘we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord’ – and how is it that God’s voice is heard? It is of course through his Word. In Psalms 85, we have the same truth expressed when the Psalmist prays ‘Let me hear what God the Lord will speak’ (v8). There can be no genuine and lasting revival if the Bible is not honoured and obeyed as the Word of God. The warning in the same verse about not turning ‘back to folly’ clearly implies that folly means to refuse to
hear what God speaks. Such folly, such foolishness, has been tragically illustrated by the destruction wrought in the worldwide Anglican Communion over the past decade by the revisionist agenda. The restoration and revival of our Communion must therefore begin with a new obedience to the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God and it is this commitment which lies at the heart of the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, which it is my privilege to chair. Let us pray that the revival we seek in Kenya will spread and be a blessing to all our brothers is sisters in Christ in the world wide Communion.

I mentioned two mistakes about revival. The second is this: When society is changing very quickly, as is ours, there is a temptation to embrace revival as a form of escapism that spares us from facing uncomfortable realities and from the hard work of thinking about how we can remain faithful to Christ in a rapidly changing world. So let us remember that the heritage we treasure of the East African Revival began with just two men who, far from being escapist, faced the reality of a church which had by and large become cold and formal and had lost its converting power. Their hearts were grieved by what they saw and a sense of their own inadequacy. Their prayer flowed from a deep hunger for the presence of the living God. The Anglican Church of Kenya is a church which has known what it is to rejoice in the living God and experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to bring reconciliation, growing churches and a love of the Scriptures as the voice of God. Today there is much good and faithful work being done, but we must be those who face reality – including the fact that overall our Church is not growing as it should at a time when the need for confident and consistent Christian witness in our nation has never been greater.

The positive truth we need to hold on to is that while revival wonderfully changes individuals and the church, it also transforms a whole nation. Kenya, along with much of the rest of Africa is going through a time of rapid change which is both a threat and an opportunity. In recent years access to mobile phones, television and the internet has expanded massively. Although we tend to be preoccupied with the immediate problems of high inflation and unemployment, our economy, like those of many other African nations, continues to grow and we are poised to receive a major boost with the discovery of commercially viable oilfields in the north. As more and more people are exposed to secular values through the media and as new leisure opportunities present themselves, a Church
which relies on inertia and simply assumes that habits of church attendance and morality will be passed on by tradition could easily follow the pattern of Western Europe fifty years ago where rising prosperity went hand in hand with falling church attendance and the breakdown of sexual morality. We are already seeing the early warning signs - young people are our Church’s crumbling edge which is being eroded by the rising tide of a globalised secular culture.

Plans and strategies have their place in meeting these challenges, but we must remember that new wineskins are pointless if they are not filled with the new wine! New structures alone cannot create life. It is the Spirit of God who gives life and when we know that enjoyment of God which is a mark of true revival, there will be an unstoppable release of energy and creativity in gospel proclamation, godly living and church growth.

Brothers and sisters, the great opportunity God is giving us in this time of change is to see His power at work through revival to change a whole nation; the depth reality behind our economic, social and political challenges is the spiritual struggle for the future of our nation and only a revived Church will be strong enough to counter the powerful secular ideologies that are increasing their foothold here. For instance, the unspoken assumption of much Western inspired development thinking is that God is irrelevant. Churches are seen as relevant only insofar as they are useful. I see this assumption already infiltrating African church leadership as we become so preoccupied with immediate material needs that the gospel is being pushed to the margins. This is a tragedy because, to borrow the language of Jeremiah, we will end up exchanging the fountain of living water for broken cisterns (Jeremiah 2:13).

True revival is holistic; we do not have to accept a trade off between the material and the spiritual. While the gospel begins with individual repentance and faith, its scope is the glory of God in all His creation and revival is an intensification of that breaking in of gospel reality through the gracious outpouring of God’s Spirit. Let us pray for a move of God which is so powerful and sustained that it goes beyond the Church and God is glorified in good government, just laws, wise stewardship of the environment, and a productive economy. The vision of revival in Psalms 85, from which I took my opening text, is not only the joy of
God’s presence with his people, but also the blessing of the land and the whole nation. The Psalmist remembers past blessing, recalling that ‘you were favourable to our land’ (v1) and his prayer now, let us remember, is ‘that glory may dwell in our land’. A restored people lead to a restored nation and a restored land.

Do you see the difference? The secular mind tends to say ‘the starting point for a transformed society is from the top down by our policies, laws and programmes’; the Christian mind should say ‘the starting point for a transformed society is from the grassroots; policies, laws and programmes are changed in response to people being transformed by the gospel’. We rightly pass laws to combat corruption and deplore the damage done to our political life by tribalism, but why do we struggle with these things when some 80% of the population of Kenya is Christian? Corruption and tribalism are ultimately about the attitude of our hearts and unaided logic, however compelling, rarely changes the human heart. A revived Christian faith as a matter of the heart’s devotion rather than outward observance would have a direct and transformative impact on our national life.

So what should we expect over these few days together? We should certainly expect that God will move in power, but we do not know how he will move and it is right that we do not know; the Holy Spirit is not at our disposal - what matters is that we are at His disposal. To put it very simply, the most important thing we can do together is to acknowledge that the Lord reigns and give the Church back to Him; we have a constant tendency to take things into our hands, but revival comes when we place the Church back in God’s hands. I want to conclude with some specific proposals about how we can do that very thing.

1. First and foremost, we need to listen to the voice of the Lord God in the Scriptures as His revealed and uniquely authoritative Word, of which the writer to the Hebrews tells us is in chapter 4:12 ‘the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart’. The first step in giving the church back to God is to submit ourselves to the searching judgement of his Word.
2. Secondly we must, in response to God’s Word, pray earnestly. The need is very great, both in our Church and Nation and in the wider Anglican Communion in which African Anglicans have an increasingly significant leadership role. It is by prayer that we place everything back in God’s hands and acknowledge our complete dependence upon Him.

3. Thirdly, if we are placing the Church and our lives back in God’s hands, then we should expect great things in the power of the Holy Spirit. Like our forbears with whom the East African revival began, we need the personal infilling of the Holy Spirit as an experienced reality. We will then know by experience the truth that Scripture teaches, that the growth and progress of the Church are not limited by our human frailty and sin, but we can look for the multiplication of the spiritual harvest as we share the Psalmist's confidence (v12) that ‘the Lord will give what is good and our land will yield its increase’.

4. Fourthly, and finally we should keep the cross of Christ always before us. We do not live for ourselves – we have been bought with a price, the precious blood of Christ. God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves by washing us from our sins. As Psalm 85 draws to a close we are told in verse 10 ‘Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other’. Is there not here a beautiful foreshadowing of the way in which God’s attributes of perfect love and perfect justice wonderfully converge at the cross where Christ our substitute, the Lamb of God offers full and final atonement for our sins? This is the great basis of our confidence in praying for the revival of God’s people, who are already his treasured possession.

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! Psalm 115:1