Edited, with additions: Albert Mosley's talk on 19 March 2023 – 75 years as a Methodist Minister

The talk was delivered without reference to notes, and there are some minor changes to improve the flow or for clarification.

There are some additional notes added as footnotes, reflecting thoughts that were present in the preparation but were not spoken on the day.

Thank you everybody for your very kind words. When Derek spoke about this some time ago and said what would be happening I said it sounds to me like the rehearsal of a funeral … and it has been worse than that. Thank you very much indeed. I can assure you that none of it was really deserved but thank you.

And thank you too to God, for allowing me to share in His work. As a lad I'd never have dreamed anything like this was going to happen to me. And thank you too to Margaret. Perhaps it is suitable that it is on mother's day that this is happening. Margaret was a wonderful wife and companion and support and friend and colleague. And thank you for my family who are continuing the support, encouraging me. And thank you too to Methodism, Methodism, for this church and churches all over the world that I have been linked with in one way or another. It has been a great honour and privilege to be able to share in the work of the kingdom of God in the way it has worked out.

As I've looked back over these last 75 years it seems to me that two lots of forces have been at play. One lot of forces bringing people together, helping them to do together the kind of things that Jesus himself spoke about when he spoke about his call to reach out to the poor, to help people who are in need, reach out to people in prison. And on the other hand, forces that were trying to pull people apart, and there has been one scene after another where both have been at work. And sometimes one has been more successful than the other.

I was ordained in 1952, got married as was the custom of Methodist ministers at that time. You weren't allowed to get married until you were ordained. I think that may have changed now, I hope so ... I think the idea was that being married might disturb your studies … yep … people haven't learned.

I was ordained in 1952 and really without any pastoral experience I was sent straight out to Zimbabwe, Southern Rhodesia. My first appointment was to be Superintendent of the Wankie circuit. Wankie was a small

mining/railway town, the mines produced coal for the whole of Southern Rhodesia and the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Wankie was 35 miles south of the Zambezi River, which formed the border with Zambia. It was near to the Victoria Falls.

My ministry was partly to a congregation of about 30 or 40 white people – they called them Europeans, and also to a big African circuit which I reckon was about the size of Yorkshire with 12 churches scattered over it [1]. I had a wonderful colleague, an African minister the Rev Green Mnyama, and he taught me a lot about pastoral work and he actually taught me Sindebele, the African language which was used in Methodist churches in that part of Rhodesia, and that was the beginning of being brought together. I had a real friend. His responsibility was the two big African townships in Wankie itself.

Margaret took charge of a little European Sunday School, and a European women's meeting. We made friends with both Africans and European people. It seemed the forces were bringing us together in that part of the world where people had been pulled apart - separate housing areas, separate schools, separate churches - black and white couldn't come together, but there, there in that fellowship together we found something of God's ability to bring people together. [2]

A crisis came when our first daughter, Sheila, was born. We had to decide who was going to christen her. There seemed to be three

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[1] *Nine of these circuit churches were used as schools during the week, and I was responsible for seeing that they worked smoothly – supplying them with books, paying the teachers monthly, and periodic inspections. I was also responsible for two larger schools in the Wankie township. Five of the teachers of the schools had been trained as evangelists and took the Sunday services in the villages. Several of the teachers were also local preachers.*

[2] *Margaret arranged for Rev. Green Mnyama to speak to her European women's group one afternoon and he told them about African family life, and the problems they faced.*
The thatched roof of one of the African village church/schools about ten miles from Wankie had to be replaced and when that was done we had a little celebration – an exhibition of the children's work, and singing and dancing. About a dozen people from the European church went along and met African parents there. African and European church members had some joint Christmas celebrations.

possibilities. Many of our friends said, Well there is an Anglican white vicar who comes up and down on the railway, he comes here about once a month, he'd be a good person to take the christening'. Second possibility was the Chairman of the District, but the Chairman of the District lived about 350 miles away.[3] He did come once a year and we could have waited for him to come. But to Margaret and myself the obvious person was our African minister.

Now one of the problems was that the English service was 7.30pm on a Sunday evening. I spent most of the day every Sunday with African Churches, but I took the Sunday evening service for the congregation of about 20-24 Europeans every Sunday and that would have been a possibility but that was at 7.30 at night and I didn't feel that was the right time to be disturbing this little baby. We decided we would have the christening at the Sunday school in the afternoon, the European Sunday school. We invited some African friends to come along, some of our adult European congregation came along and she was christened by Green Mnyama and then they all came along to our house for a cup of tea and cake afterwards.

But that caused a problem. Some of our European church members said they would never send their children to the Sunday school again; they had had to see a black minister having in his arms a little white child. They had friends that they had been trying to get to come to church and their friends would not come when that is the kind of thing that was done In your church, and so they themselves never came to church again or sent their children to Sunday School again. Even when they were in trouble and I went to see them, the only thing they would talk about was the terrible thing that had happened at the Sunday school.

Now you can't believe that in England today, but that did happen, and soon after that we were moved.

We went to the Theological College near Salisbury to help train African ministers and evangelists.

The last 4 years of my time in Zimbabwe was spent at Waddilove Training Institution where again we can see the work of God bringing people together. It was a training institution for African teachers, agricultural demonstrators and nurses. We were training about 300 people to work together and help other people to live better lives. I had a staff of about 15, European and African.

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[3] *150 miles to Bulaweyo and from there a further 200 miles to Salisbury*

Now those of you in education might understand that in an institution like that where there were three departments, there might be tension between the departments, and there was some of that but that wasn't very much. Sometimes the Africans and the Europeans didn't understand each other and there was a little amount of tension, but not very much. We had the staff along to our house every Friday evening and the African staff taught us to play some African games, and we taught them to play dominoes and things like that. We had refreshments, and everything was going extremely well in Waddilove, and we were being drawn together.

But round us things were getting difficult.

There had been some attempts in the country to bring black and white together. Garfield Todd had been Prime Minister, an ex-missionary from New Zealand, and he had tried to improve things but somehow there seemed to be a force that was keeping on pulling people apart. Ian Smith was elected Prime Minister, and commenting on the reforms Garfield Todd had tried to introduce he said, 'Never in my lifetime will this become a reality here'. Forces were pulling people apart, and things, around Waddilove and in the whole country were becoming difficult. The African people had come to the conclusion that there would never be justice until there was an African majority government, and some people were getting quite violent.

I took the Sunday service every Sunday morning at Waddilove, and one Sunday morning when I came out of church I found a man in a grey suit waiting with his car. He said, 'Are you the Reverend Mosley', I said 'Yes', 'I would like to have a talk with you, is there somewhere where we can go and we can have this talk', 'Yes, I'll take you to my office'. I offered him a cup of tea but he wasn't interested. He said to me 'There are two things I need to talk to you about. First of all we have got the circulation list of the National Democratic Party, the African political party and we find that you are getting their literature. Are you a member?' 'No', I said, 'I've got 17/18 year old students here, African students, and they are deeply interested in what is going on in the country and they get this literature and I need to know what my students are thinking. That's the only reason why I get this National Democratic Party literature'. 'Oh' he said, 'OK, well the second one is this. Institutions like yours, there are two or three of them that have already been attacked by these …' I forget what he called them, but it wasn't very polite, 'We think you may be going to be attacked as well. What we want you to do is to find somewhere in the institution where if trouble gets too bad you can barricade yourselves in, just the white staff, just the

white staff, you can barricade yourselves in. You will need to have a store of rifles, you will need to have some ammunition, food, water, access to a telephone so that you can telephone the government and police when this has begun, so that we can come and rescue you. Can you think of somewhere where you can do this?', and I thought for a minute.

Now I am a Methodist I thought, so I need to take it to a committee. But I didn't. Something inside me said 'say No', and I said No. I said, 'We are here to help the African people, we are here to help them to lead fuller lives and help them to help other people to lead fuller lives, and if, if there was even a suggestion of anything like this, if the African students thought the European staff are thinking that one day they will barricade themselves in against us, huh, we might as well go home'. So straight away I said No.

Afterwards I learned that the District Office had been considering this kind of situation that might develop and they had come to the conclusion that if it did happen they would ask the men to stay, and the women and children to come into the capital Harare. I said 'Yes', when I heard of this, I said 'But I have some women on the staff who are Feminists and if they think it's being said that men would remain here and the women all be protected in the capital, they would say but we want to stay with the men. We are not people who need to be looked after like that.' And so we carried on.

And about 2 weeks after that man had been, I was able to meet some of the … what they call 'terrorists', others called them 'African liberation workers'.

Besides having the responsibility for looking after the institution I was also Superintendent of a little circuit. There were only 2 church/schools and 3 preaching places. One of the preaching places was Marandellas prison. Because of all the unrest in the country the government had arrested a whole lot of political activists, 2-300 of them from all over the country and about 50 of them were detained in Marandellas prison. I went along to Marandellas prison every Wednesday morning before the detainees came, and took services for the prisoners there. I continued when all the political activists were there as well.

It was interesting to find that many of the political activists knew the hymns without any problem, obviously a lot of them were church people. After a short while the government decided which of them were really serious problems, then many of them were released. It ended up with 5 that they called 'the hard core', the people who were leading the

resistance to the government. I decided it was important that I should go along and meet with them every week although it wasn't sensible to try to have a service for 5 in that situation. So I went every week and began with talking about studies they were doing. Many of them were studying for degrees in law, social sciences and political sciences, and afterwards when I thought about it I realised there were going to be more PhDs in Zimbabwean prisons, than there were in the Cabinet in London.

I talked with them about their studies. Some of them needed books that they couldn't get, I managed to get some books for them. Some of them knew their families back home were having problems, and I was able to get in touch with the local ministers there and get them to help the families with their problems. And then we began to do Bible Study. Every time we began with Bible Study, in the end the discussion developed into questions about politics. Somehow Bible Study and politics seemed to come together. I carried on doing that for about 2 years, and then the time came for us to come on furlough.

Margaret's parents were getting frail and we realised we needed to stay in England for a time to help them. So we came to England and looked for a circuit. I think I probably got the shortest invitation to a circuit that a Methodist minister may ever have had. It was from one of the stewards of Keighley Circuit. The letter simply said, 'Dear Albert, we want a man, will you come'. That's the way they did it in Keighley. Fortunately it was quite near to Margaret's home and so we went to Keighley and spent some six years there. During that time I got a letter from one of the people I had been with in Marandellas prison. Let me read you a paragraph, it's not very long:

"By now you may well have forgotten the Christian message you used to bring to us and you may be surprised that my friends and I still remember some of the things you said. The most striking of these for me was the one about the significance of the Cross. Probably I remember it because somehow the things in it were then and even since relevant to the kind of life which I find myself in.'

They called him, they called people like this, African terrorists. I understood them as freedom fighters and they were my friends.

We looked after Margaret's parents for about 6 years, and then both of them had died.

From the beginning of our ministry we had said that we would serve in Rhodesia for as long as possible. We had taken out Rhodesian

citizenship because we felt we wanted to have a stake in the country if we were to work there.

In 1978 I went to a meeting of the Central Committee of the Overseas Division in London. I was the West Yorkshire District Secretary of the Overseas Division at the time. Harry Morton was looking out for me and asked me to meet him when the meeting was over. He said that Tom Baird had come home on furlough from the Theological College in Rhodesia but could not go back for family reasons. 'You used to work at the Theological College there. Can you go back in his place?'

So I said 'Yes, I will consider it'. I went home, I talked it over with Margaret, and prayed about it, thought about it, sent word – 'Yes, we are happy to go back'. So we had all our injections, the older two of our children were regarded as heroes in their local schools because they were going to Rhodesia. Then we got a letter from the government office in Rhodesia saying, 'We have noticed your application for a work permit to return to Rhodesia and the answer is we cannot issue you with a work permit. You cannot come back'.

It was a shock for all the family. We took the children to Bradford to see the Sound of Music which had just come out, to help them get over it and then we had a weekend staying in a youth hostel in Cambridge, it was quite a shock.

I had seen the forces pulling people together in Rhodesia but here again were people who put up barriers, people who were saying, 'We cannot allow you to come back because you treat people here in ways different from what we do.' We didn't go back, and I thought that was the end of our link with Rhodesia until about 10 years later.

I was working at Mission House in London and Rhodesia came to us.

Most of the African countries had become independent. There had been a meeting of the Commonwealth leaders and Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere had spoken to Margaret Thatcher and said it is time you dealt with Rhodesia. So she had called the Lancaster House conference which some of you may remember. Lancaster House conference. The African politicians had split into two groups, those under Mugabe and those under Nkomo. There was also Ian Smith's group. The three groups were brought together at Lancaster House, and I wondered if there was anything I could possibly do to help.

I had a Methodist friend who worked for ACAS, you'll remember ACAS. ACAS brought together management and Trades Unions when there were disputes and it helped them to come to some agreement. I thought

here was a situation where ACAS can guide me as to what I can do, if anything, to help. My friend said there is nothing you can do except pray for them, and perhaps you can let them know that there are people concerned and people supporting and wanting them to come together. Together with Anglican friends I arranged a little service at St Martin in the Fields. We prayed before the conference began that it would be a success. Then I began visiting the three groups in an evening.

It was interesting. Most of the Mugabe group were men that I had known in Marandellas prison and so it was easy to make friends with them again. Nkomo's group, well Nkomo was in fact a Methodist local preacher so that was a contact. His group also spoke Sindebele and I was still fairly fluent in Sindebele so as soon as I went amongst them speaking Sindebele they recognised that I was a friend.

And then there was Ian Smith's group. The only person I knew among them was ... in a strange way, Abel Muzorewa, the Bishop of the Methodist Church in Rhodesia that had links with America. For some reason he had been brought into the Ian Smith group. I spent one evening chatting with him, and I said, 'Abel is there anything I can do to help this conference'. He said, 'Albert there is one thing, I can't get to sleep easily at night worrying about all the problems that we have'. He said, 'I have got a cd player and if only you could only get me a cd playing Jim Reeves singing 'How Great Thou Art' it would remind me every night that God is in charge and that would help me to get to sleep, I could leave all of the problem of the day with God and I could get to sleep and I would be fresh to share in the discussions on the following day.'

I said 'Right'. I nipped up to Oxford Street record shops. Unfortunately none of them had Jim Reeves singing 'How Great Thou Art' but I managed to get a choir singing it, took that to him, and he was very grateful. Now that was my contribution to the Lancaster House talks.

The discussion did seem to bring people together. They made an agreement.

I visited Zimbabwe three years later. Getting through the barrier at the airport was a bit of a problem, I was asked to fill in a form which said, 'Have you ever been refused permission to enter a country', and I said to the man, 'I can only put in here that I was once refused permission to come into your country'. He said, 'You can't put that; you can't put that'. I said, 'Well I …'. The President of the country at that time was Canaan Banana, a Methodist Minister. I said, ' I know your President very well. If you give me a telephone I can speak to him and he will tell you what to

do'. 'Oh No you can't do that'. He tore the form up. He filled in the form in a different way for me and said, 'Now come on, you can go through'.

So I was allowed in, and I was able with the President of the Church in the country at that time, the Rev Crispin Mazobere, to go round visiting many places in Zimbabwe. I found there was a new spirit, a sense of people working together. I went to Wankie, and found that they had an African minister in charge, caring for both Africans and Europeans. I took a service in the main Church in the capital and found that there were African and European stewards working in the vestry and bringing people together. The congregation was a mixed congregation. The forces that bring people together had brought people together and it was a joy to see what had happened.

But the forces that pull people apart were not letting things stay like that. Something went wrong, I don't know what it was. Mugabe decided that he wouldn't be safe until he attacked Nkomo's people, and there was a disaster.

But I believe God is still at work, and the forces that bring people together are still at work.

So that is my experience of Zimbabwe, and thinking over what happened then I see the same kind of thing here.

It was a joy to work with people of other faiths here in Oadby. We found that God brought us together.

It has been a joy to work with asylum seekers, and as I see what is happening now with Olive, the asylum seeker, wanting to work for the good of people but not being allowed permission to stay, I am deeply grateful that many people are supporting her application.

The forces that pull people apart are at work in our society here, refusing permission for asylum seekers to stay, people who could make a tremendous contribution to the country, people who we can learn from if only we let them in. Those forces are at work, but the other forces are at work as well, and I pray that, well I am sure that in the end God's forces which are the ones which are bringing people together will triumph. But there may be times when we have to face the problems and life won't always be easy.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts. Thank you for coming today. Thank you for all the support and help which I have been given all through my ministry.

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Applause

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Derek, the Minister: thank you. As I was listening I was trying to work out whether on some of these issues of justice you were twenty years, thirty years or fifty years ahead of your time, thank you.

It is no surprise that the hymn that you have suggested we sing next is 713, ‘Show me how to stand for