**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

**File Title: Hertford College Chapel 6.11.83. Address by GLC at Oxford on The hope of the disabled person**

# **Preservation copy**

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Start of Transcription

00:00 Group Captain Leonard Cheshire: Sunday November 6th 1983, Hartford College Chapel Oxford, evening talk. Subject the hope of the…[Disabled Person]

00:13 LC: In the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit. Amen.

00:25 LC: I'd like to say what a pleasure it is for me and what a privilege I count it to have been invited by you to join you this evening. And I do thank the Reverend Michael Chantry and the vice-chancellor for inviting me, despite the fact that you have put up with me once before. I also say thank you with all my heart for you for having come from John Maysfield to be here and to give me support. Thank you.

01:03 My theme is the hope of the disabled person and in talking about that, I would like to try and show that the hope of the disabled person is also the hope of the world, of all of us, individually and collectively as the one human family. I would also like to try and suggest that bringing that hope to fulfilment is the special vocation of this generation as we move towards the end of the twentieth century.

1:53 My starting point is the unity of our human family, our interdependence, the fact that we are truly one human family and that whatever happens to any part of that human family ultimately affects all the rest. Its unity is not artificial, manmade, shall we say like a beautiful vase of flowers, it's organic. It is literally like a person, however difficult that may be at this moment, but it is a disabled person, a person disabled by divisions, by confrontations, by injustice. But we are one human family, all children of the same God and all destined for the same eternal end, to live in heaven through all eternity in the presence of God, seeing Him as he really is. But St Paul in his second reading that we heard tonight gives an even deeper dimension to that unity and that destiny.  He says God's plan for the fulfilment of time to unite all things in Christ, things on earth and things in heaven. He is not talking only about people, about the members of the human family, he is talking about all creation and he is uniting the created world as we see it, things on earth, with the eternal uncreated world in heaven.

4:20 It must mean that our function, our role here on earth during our lifetime is of course firstly to build ourselves, each one of us, into the unique masterpiece that God has willed. Each of us unique, each of us with our own share of human nature, here on earth to build ourselves into a masterpiece that God has willed. But in addition, to play our part in building up the entire creation into the unique masterpiece that God has willed. It must mean that our business is not only, as is put in Christian language, saving our own selves but it means that everything that we do on earth so long as it is good and in accordance with the will of God, is actually building up eternity. That the things we do, the things we suffer, our response to different situations, will carry forward into eternity and become eternalised, not of course by our power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in each one of us and who is continually at work in the world.

6:18 What does it mean in terms of our own response? It means of course that there must of course be a total response from us to the voice of God calling us to whatever we have to do - of course a voice that we don't actually hear but that we see in other people in our duty and so on - But I think that it in a very special way our destiny is achieved, we build ourselves up and we help build the world up into that final unique masterpiece. By the way that we meet suffering and disability, by our response to it.

7:15 What then is the hope of the disabled person? I think that it is best defined and best understood as freedom. That is to say freedom for each person to choose the way of life that he or she wants. The importance of freedom is that with freedom goes responsibility. If I am not free I am not responsible even for the ordering of my own life but proportionally as I become freer, so I acquire responsibility for directing and building up my own life and I share responsibility for the wellbeing of all other men and women. Freedom I am sure is the way that the goal that all of us should be seeking when we share the struggle, of disabled people, to achieve what they want. Freedom is the best definition of that goal.

8:45 If it is to be achieved, there has to be a response from society. Society must provide a whole range of differing living facilities so that each disabled person can chose the one he or she wants. I look upon it rather as a ladder with many rungs. Some disabled people want to live almost completely independently in their own home with their family. Others, perhaps because of the severity or the nature of their disability or other reasons, prefer to live in a community, in a residential home. For some that residential home will be a home for life in which they can flower and feel secure and do the things they would like to do. For others it will be a stepping rung to move up to a higher degree of independence. And what he or she wants should be tailored and geared to his particular circumstances and needs. There can never be such as thing as an ideal solution for disabled people. So, society ought to continue providing more and more different forms of living facilities. But in a way this is the easier part because this is providing something material. There is something else that goes with disability and that is the inner struggle and although I do this with humility, realising that what I am saying can only be a generalisation, I would like to try for a moment and enter into the heart of a person, particularly a young person, who at the outset of their life suddenly becomes severely disabled.

11:26 A few days ago, I was in one of our independent living facilities in Toronto, Canada and in the room were four people between 19 and 22, each of whom had broken their neck - in layman's language - from a diving accident. They were in a wheelchair, paralysed from the waist down and partially paralysed in their arms and back. What happens in the heart of a person at that age on the threshold of life who suddenly becomes so disabled? Of course, to begin with they may be in intensive care and something will appear to be happening, treatment is going on, there is still hope. But the day will come when somebody will, say in one way or another, this is how you are going to be for all your life. I think, but I say that this is a generalisation, I think that in many young hearts the first reaction is one of sorrow, of mourning, you mourn for something you have lost as if you in the same kind of way you mourn for somebody close to you who you have lost. But that for many people will be replaced, or overwritten by, something quite different that I can only call an inner revolt. You revolt against it. You can't help saying ‘why? Why has this happened to me now, just when I was beginning my life?’ That revolt as I call it may take many forms, it may take the form of withdrawal. I don't want to know, I don't want to cooperate. That withdrawal may be concealed by an outward, pleasant nice attitude but the person has withdrawn from the struggle to build herself or himself up. In others may take the form of anger against anybody. Against a mother, a wife, a doctor, a nurse. It isn't against the person, it's against what has happened. What should our response be if we are close to that person? I think the one thing we should not do is try to ignore it, try to pretend it isn't there. We ought to make ourselves available. To build up a relationship with that person in which the disabled person will feel safe. By that I mean he will feel that he can say anything he likes however dreadful it may sound and not be judged. We need to give that one commodity that we find most difficult in our present age, time, just to be there as a companion ready for the moment when that person may feel that he can say something about what's inside him so that it can come out and he can then begin to build his life. When we see disabled people looking so cheerful, so positive, concentrating on what is and will be and not thinking about what might have been. Sometimes we perhaps overlook the inner struggle, very personal to each one, very different in each individual case, to which I am quite certain every disabled person has had to go through.

15:48 For a moment may we look at freedom. The goal we are seeking. What is freedom? We usually talk about freedom as freedom from restrictions of one kind or another and freedom to, freedom to do what I want. But in its deep meaning, freedom is freedom for. Freedom for the service of other people. If we gain freedom, we do not gain it for its own sake, we gain it in order to pass on to others and it is in putting ourselves at the service of other people that we gain our own fulfilment. That most of all we begin to attain the full stature of perfection for which we are destined. And so, we have to ask what are we who are proud to call ourselves members of a free world. How are we using our freedom towards other parts of the world who don't have the freedom we have? Who live under the limitations of injustice of one kind or another. And I talk particularly of the injustice of great poverty because some of the other political injustices are difficult to judge and people will hold differing views. But about poverty, the poor of the developing world, there could be no difference of view.

17:46 I think that the great failure of our present time, of our generation, is that we have failed so far to act decisively to do something about the poverty of the poor world. There is no denying the complexity of the problem. There is no denying that the fault lies on many sides. But what is lacking is the will to do something. Some of us think that if only we could disarm the money would be there to put the problem right. But respectfully I say, leaving aside the difficult question of how peace is best achieved, respectfully I say that if that money was saved it would not go to the poor of the developing world. It would go on lower taxes, higher wages, better social security, better roads and so on. The truth is that the poor of the developing world are not a major issue in our hearts. In fact, we spend more on alcohol and tobacco each year than we do on arms. We could give some of that up and give it to the poor if we meant it. I think the great challenge that we face, and on which the future security and peace and wellbeing of the world will depend, is the challenge of helping the developing world stand on its feet economically. What we need to do, if it can be condensed into a sentence, is to act towards the poor sections of the world - I mean for international society to act towards the poor sections of the world in the same way that a nation does to its underprivileged members - A nation sees it as only right to make provision for those of its members who cannot live as others do. In other words, there should be the same kind of justice between nations towards the poorer sections as there is within the nation itself. I find particularly amongst the young great idealism, a great desire to do something to build a better world and I have always since the end of the war, having known what a world war is, longed for the day when our country, Britain, would set an example to others in making a sacrifice – because without it we cannot achieve this goal – making a sacrifice, to help bring to fulfilment that hope of the disabled person and of the entire human family to achieve greater freedom. Thank you.

21:25 Speech Ends

21:26 music to 47:00

47:00 Recording Ends.

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