

St. Peter's Community, Hinckley

“The Servant Church”

A programme of adult formation for 2013-2014

“The Church is or should go back to being a community of the people of God. Priests, pastors and bishops who have the care of souls are at the service of the people of God....” (Pope Francis- September 2013)

“The Servant Church” - Introduction

“The Servant Church” is a new project on the Church. It will take the form of three sets of six discussion / conversation evenings on Sundays to reflect on what the meaning of ‘the Church’ is to us and what it means to belong to it. We all know only too well that many people are now drifting away from faith and church life and this is especially upsetting in the “Year of Faith”, which was intended by Pope Benedict to stimulate and invigorate our lives with the Lord and with each other in his family. This is a very sad scenario, particularly for young people, who run the risk of rather aimless, purpose-less lives without some ‘anchor’ to sustain them. We also know that the Church as an institution has been perceived as rather authoritarian, centralised and lacking in compassion and the ‘scandals’ which have come to light in the past few years have served only to shake the faith of good souls, and given the media ample ammunition to beat us with. However, this is not the whole picture. There are many people also who, because of the ministry of Pope Francis, have taken a renewed interest in their life with the Lord within the Church. There are also those who, though they do not formally belong to the Catholic Church themselves, have faithfully come to Mass with their partners and families for years, perhaps without realising that they were in fact Catholics in all but name. This may be the time to ‘take the plunge’ and think seriously about finally accepting the call of Our Lord to fully belong to the Catholic family. There are also a few of our young people who are thinking about ‘confirmation’ of the promises their parents made on their behalf when they were baptised.

So what do we mean when we say ‘the Church’ and how do we picture it and our place within it? 50 years ago, the Vatican Council defined the Church as the ‘people of God’ and there are many who now argue that this definition has never been fully worked out. The spectre of those pre-Vatican II dark days of control and centralisation has returned to haunt us, but is being slowly but surely blown away by this wonderful gift to us who is Pope Francis. Recently he said that he aimed to make the Church less ‘Vatican-centric’ and closer to ‘the people of God’ as well as more socially conscious and open to modern culture. He has also emphatically stated that he wishes the Church to be ‘the Church of the poor, for the poor’. His words are at one and the same time a delight and also a huge challenge to us, and this is what we intend to explore together in “The Servant Church”, and hope that many parishioners and friends will come to join us in reflecting on what the future holds for us, our children and grandchildren as members of the Church in the midst of a highly secular world from which we cannot escape into the ‘ghetto of our minds’ as so often happened in the past. None of this detracts from our great respect for our fellow Christians, particularly in the churches of our town, with whom we have such a close relationship and who are ‘on the road’ with us. Any consideration of what we mean by ‘Church’ in the future cannot take place without them, and indeed the vision of the Church of the future will certainly be that of a more united ecumenical community called

together by Our Lord to honour and serve Him. In all of this we have so much to give each other, in sharing the 'lived' experience of our faith with its challenges and difficulties. No one, in the Pope's words, is more important than anyone else and the days of the 'top-down' Church are certainly gone. We hope that these evenings will be an exciting exploration of what this implies for us and our families and let us pray that this will be a time of great renewal and enthusiasm for everyone.

SECTION 1

Session 1 - What does 'Church' mean to you?

The group was asked for their opinions and some replies were: *A family or community; a building with a spire on it; the physical manifestation of connection to God – a reference point; 'home'; a place to meet and make friends; somewhere to speak to God*

The Church is a community of believers, the followers of Jesus Christ, who are 'called together' (cf. Greek – 'ecclesiastical') for a purpose – not just an institution or casual group of people. Institutions (eg. golf clubs, political parties) make rules to ensure their survival. This was the way with the Church, but now we see the 'rules' as expressions of our behaviour if we believe that Jesus is our Saviour, in other words what we will be and do if we believe in him. There are only two references to 'the Church' in the gospels: "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church" (Mt.16:18) and "But if he (your 'brother') refuses to listen to these, report it to the community" (Mt.18:17). There are many more of course in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of St.Paul, which we will consider later. The Second Vatican Council said: "The Church is the people of God", and this notion was fundamental for all its documents. It is echoed very strongly in the words of our new Pope, whom we will quote extensively during this course:

"The Church is or should go back to being a community of the people of God. Priests, pastors and bishops who have the care of souls are at the service of the people of God...."

From Pope Francis: This is the Church, a word that is different from the Holy See, which has an important function, but is at the service of the Church.

A church that limits itself to just carrying out administrative duties, caring for its tiny flock, is a church that in the long run will get sick. The pastor who isolates himself is not a true pastor of sheep but a 'hairstylist' for sheep, who spends his time putting curlers on them instead of going to look for others. Today we have one in the pen and 99 we need to go looking for....

The Church must not become ideological by proclaiming its own ideas and claiming the Gospel as its own possession. Instead the Church must be like the moon, receiving and

reflecting the light of Christ. The Church's light must diminish so that he increases. This is the model John (the Baptist) offers us today, for us and for the Church; a Church that is always at the service of the Word, a Church that never takes anything for herself. The Church must listen to the Word and courageously use its voice to proclaim Christ, pointing people to him and leading the way until martyrdom.

Jesus did not gather the apostles so that they lived in isolation. He called them so that they formed a group, a community.

The Catholic Church must find a new balance between insisting on its moral teaching and proclaiming the gospel in a missionary style; otherwise even the moral edifice of the Church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and the fragrance of the gospel. The proposal of the gospel must be more simple, profound, radiant. It is from this proposition that the moral consequences then flow.. The Church's pastoral ministry cannot be obsessed with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently. Proclamation in a missionary style focuses on the essentials, on necessary things: this is also what fascinates and attracts more, what makes the heart burn, as it did for the disciples at Emmaus...The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds, and to warm the hearts of the faithful. It needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person about if he has high cholesterol and the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. The Church has sometimes locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the Church must be ministers of mercy above all...Those who today always look for disciplinarian solutions, those who long for an exaggerated doctrinal 'security', those who stubbornly try to recover a past that no longer exists – they have a static and inward-directed view of things. In this way, faith becomes an ideology among other ideologies....

This is the beginning of a Church with an organisation that is not just top-down, but also horizontal....The Church that Jesus and his disciples preached was missionary and poor and is still valid today....Our goal is not to proselytise but to listen to needs, desires and disappointments, despair and hope. We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor....the main purpose is to help every person to follow the good and fight evil as he conceives them. This will be enough to make the world a better place.

Father Basil Loftus is a very learned, elderly priest now living in Scotland, who has written many appropriate comments about our "Church" in his columns in the Catholic Times over the past few years. We will also use some of them here.

***From Basil Loftus:** It would be easy today to bow out of the challenges Francis is throwing down to the Church. Some people have opted to do so. Surely we need to ask what contribution to evangelisation is being made by those who lock themselves up in chapels exclusively dedicated to the Tridentine Mass or to the personal ordinariate for ex-anglicans. What help to the wider Church is to be found in the blinkered so-called 'traditionalism' of those who will not accept the validity and rich contribution to the life of the Church made by the Second Vatican Council? We have a Pope who sees the Church as a prisoner of its own petty-minded past and who is determined to break free of single issue fanaticism....But this can only be effective if it is initiated and supported throughout by a clear shift of emphasis from bishops and priests, stressing that 'health and safety at church' is no longer a priority in preaching the gospel, and urging all God's people to take initiatives, to risk getting it wrong or getting hurt, rather than parroting what they learned in the past and getting sick by mouldering in closed communities which are not only airless, but impervious even to the mighty wind of the Holy Spirit*

Session 2 - Problems today – why have people stopped going to church?

This question in itself defines the problem – 'going to church'. Our faith is not a matter of 'going to church', like going to the cinema, theatre, shopping or some sporting event, because this 'attendance' implies some form of detachment from what is happening, whereas our faith is a living, involving experience in the life of the Lord within and without his Church. If we think of it as 'going to church' or not we will always be detached and be looking for some thing for ourselves, to 'get something out of it' and thus fundamentally miss the whole point of faith – loving and serving the Lord. The main reason that we have stopped 'going to church' is that we have stopped loving the Lord, if indeed we ever did love him or know what loving him means, and it is only when this can be rediscovered that we will ever regularly want to pray and celebrate the Eucharist together again. Not only have we stopped loving the Lord, but we have stopped loving each other and have become incredibly inward-looking as individuals, to the point that we cannot see anyone or anything outside ourselves. This has also happened to the Church as a community and the word Pope Francis most frequently uses to describe this situation is 'self-referential'. Look at Appendix 1 to see a reflection on this situation in a recent homily. But why has all this come about? It is not easy to find a true explanation, but there are many features of modern life that probably play some part in it.

a) The culture of 'the diary' – we will quote extensively here from a book called "Is God Still an Englishman?" by the journalist Cole Moreton

***From Cole Moreton** – We didn't stop going to church because of spiritual apathy or a rejection of the ways of God, or any of those things the preachers like to accuse us of. Well, maybe some of us did but most of us just found better things to do.*

Sunday trading began in 1994 and has a cataclysmic effect on church-going. *There was a genuine expectation among church leaders that the numbers might rise again, like the Lord, if the message was put across clearly. Instead, for some strange reason, people started to believe that looking at nice things in pleasantly lit, warm shops, and getting an instant buzz from buying them, and sitting down for a coffee and cake with their companions before looking at some more nice things were more attractive than sitting in a cold and gloomy stone barn being shouted at by a fish-faced man who called you a sinner. Fancy that....In the 90's recession, the British responded by working longer hours than the people of any other country in Europe, which had an impact on the weekend; we were too tired, too frantic catching up with essential chores or too occupied with work that had to be brought home to think about eating, let alone going out to church. The Sunday roast fell out of favour. So did the habit of staying together in one place all day. A decade after the shopping and drinking laws were changed, researchers found that 80% of adults took a trip on a Sunday to visit friends, family, museums, gardens, parks, galleries, cinemas, shopping centres and sports events...almost anywhere except a place of worship.*

From 1992 Sky TV began its sports channel and totally revolutionised Sundays, showing 'live' sports matches all day. This was coupled with the advent of Sunday morning 'mini-rugby' and football, and dancing classes for children. All of a sudden there was a great choice of 'alternative activities' to church-going, and of course, they seemed more attractive. **From Cole Moreton:** *All over the country bleary eyed parents ferry their sons and daughters to matches and back home again...where once they might have followed the family tradition and gone along to a church service. Some churches responded by putting on services on Sunday afternoons or weekday evenings, but it hasn't really worked. The connection has been broken.*

From Pope Francis: *Catholics can't put their faith on a part-time schedule or rely on it just for the moments they choose; being a Christian is a full-time occupation. If people don't open their hearts to the Holy Spirit to let God purify and enlighten them, then our being Christian will be superficial. Knowing and doing what God wants is not possible with mere human effort – it takes the transformative action of the Holy Spirit*

b) The culture of 'Me'

L'Oreal advert –“because you're worth it”, has defined so much of our lives that we don't even realise and placed the individual at the very centre of their own needs and interests, thus isolating them from others and the Lord in particular. There is a commercial need for self-interest in that the economy is based on retail spending. So many jobs and lives depend on people spending, spending and spending not only to feed themselves but especially to pamper themselves.

The emergence and rise of 'social media' enhances the process outlined above, which results in their becoming increasingly inward-looking. Do others really care if you are still in your pyjamas at 12.00 noon and want to tell everyone else?? Is your life so interesting that you can't want to share it in all its minutiae with thousands of others via 'Face-Book' and 'Twitter'? Apparently so. The founder of 'Face-Book' is now worth a staggering 7 billion dollars and is the world's richest man.

Personal opinion has now become paramount – phone-ins, interactive broadcasting are one thing and the increased use of the word 'rights' is another. The internet has furthermore provided people with the opportunity to think that they have suddenly become 'experts' on a wide variety of topics simply because they read it up on-line.

This can be traced back as far as the 1980's....

From Cole Moreton – Mrs. Thatcher had her own compelling certainties at odds with the old ones. She had a new morality centred on wealth creation; she had a new understanding of society as a collection of individuals, motivated to look out for themselves and their families rather than the common good....She once told David Frost: "the essence of human rights is that each person can choose between right and wrong. That is the essence of morality, that is the essence of religion....How can you develop your character, develop your responsibilities, if you are not allowed the right to choose? As I understand it, the right to choose is the essence of Christianity." ...Margaret Thatcher believed that her policies were releasing people into a personal freedom at the heart of Christianity. Those who could do so should be free to make serious money, for it was in the creation of wealth that the poor could be helped – through either charitable giving or the trickle-down effect of spending. It was not the State's job to pursue social justice; indeed, that was impossible. Robin Inskip, Viscount Caldecote, whose job it was to put names forward for the Archbishop of Canterbury (George Carey) said: "the primary task of the Christian Church is to preach the gospel and to proclaim the 'good news'. There is also a duty to your neighbour. If you are going to be able to support the weak, somebody needs to be relatively wealthy. It is important that the Christian Church should support the concept of wealth creation and look carefully at the use made of riches acquired and how they are shared. It should comment on social problems and point out what needs to be put right, but it should be careful in saying precisely how those problems should be solved." English faith was being privatised, just like the Gas Board. We could all buy shares in whatever kind of god we fancied, or not; it was a matter of choice, the golden word of the Thatcher years.....the Thatcherite version of 'love thy neighbour' was to leave thy neighbour alone to mind his own business.

As a consequence of all this 'marketing' a church life became prevalent – accept Jesus because it will be good for you. Here is a form of faith that does not include 'the other', but is offered to us as for our own benefit.

The vision of 'me' put before us by the Pope is entirely different:

***From Pope Francis:** "Who is Jorge Bergoglio?" I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner...In life God accompanies persons, and we must accompany them, starting from their situation....If we don't think about God, everything ends up being about 'me', and my own comfort. The real meaning of life, the importance of other people, all of these become unreal, they no longer matter, everything boils down to one thing: having. Whenever material things, money, worldliness become the centre of our lives, they take hold of us, they possess us; we lose our very identity as human beings. We are made in God's image and likeness not that of material objects, not that of idols*

The consequence of all this pre-occupation with 'me', however, is often a sense of over-stimulation, boredom and a growing feeling of pointlessness in life. Look at Appendix 2 to see some of the lyrics of "Mother Mary", which reflect this. On the other hand, recently in a church in Leicester there was a weekend festival attended by 3,000 Catholics. How can we explain this? They were from Kerala, India, where their faith is characterised by a wonderful humility and simplicity. Their faith in God is implicit and their respect for 'the parent' knows no bounds. There is no room for arrogance or self-seeking here, or even a trace of it.

c) The 'secularist' world

We now live in a society which is unashamedly godless, and there is no longer any pretence. We must say, however, that people who do not believe in God are not necessarily bad people – many of them are thoroughly splendid, kind and generous, unlike (one might argue) many so-called 'believers', especially when you think of the truly dreadful things that people do to each other 'in the name of God'. Pope Benedict spoke of 'aggressive secularism', when he visited Britain in 2010 and he is now being slowly proved right, as the vestiges of Christianity seem to disappear – the renaming of the 'Christmas' feast as 'Winter Festival', the prevention of wearing religious symbols for some but not all religious groups, the removal of the oath of allegiance to God in court and uniformed bodies etc. To 'believe' in this world is often perceived to be a rather foolish pre-occupation, something that is not scientifically verifiable and therefore untrue, and to practise a belief is sometimes to incur ridicule from others that many people are not strong enough to resist.

***From Cole Moreton** – Some church leaders say, with ungodly bitterness, that we have become a secular society; but (archbishop) Rowan Williams say's that's not the case. Instead he says that we are 'haunted by the memory of religion' (on Hillsborough) For better or for worse it (the new way of mourning) was going to spread beyond*

Merseyside. It was going to become part of the English soul, this public weeping and reaching out for meaning, this improvised ritual and sharing of pain.

d) The Church 'organisation' itself – 'ghetto mentality'

The Catholic Church in recent times has struggled with being exposed as hypocritical and deceitful, especially in the matter of the abuse of children by its clergy and the covering up of their offences by its bishops. The effect of this behaviour has been devastating. More than this, there has been a concerted attempt to return to the 'certainties' of past ages, almost as if the Second Vatican Council had never happened. Right wing movements and religious congregations have flourished and yet floundered once their hypocrisy was exposed, and even today, a French bishop in the Society of S.Pius V has called the rite of Mass which has been present for the past 50 years as 'evil'. Retiring into the 'ghetto-mindset' of certainty and people doing as they were told by the clergy will not solve our problems as the Pope points out:

From Pope Francis: *When we Christians are closed in our group, in our movement, in our parish, in our own environment, we remain closed and what happens to us is what happens to whatever remained closed. When a room is closed the odour of humidity gathers. And if a person is closed in that room, they become ill. When a Christian is closed in his group or parish or movement, he remains closed and becomes ill.*

Heads of the Church have often been narcissists, flattered and thrilled by their courtiers. The court is the leprosy of the papacy. The Curia has one defect: it is Vatican-centric. It sees and looks after the interests of the Vatican, which are still, for the most part, temporal interests. This Vatican-centric view neglects the world around us. I do not share this view and I'll do everything I can to change it....The Church is or should go back to being a community of the people of God. Priests, pastors and bishops who have the care of souls are at the service of the people of God.... The most serious of all the evils that afflict the world these days are youth unemployment and the loneliness of the old. This, to me, is the most urgent problem the Church is facing... ..I believe in God, not in a Catholic God. There is no Catholic God, there is God, and I believe in Jesus Christ, his incarnation. Jesus is my teacher and my pastor but God, the father, Abba, the light and the creator. This is my being....Clericalism should not have anything to do with Christianity.

(Clericalism – the idea that the bishop or priest is superior to the rest of the people of God because of his ordination, and therefore runs the Church rather than serving it.)

From Basil Loftus: *The Pope worries about the risk of any single part of Church teaching or practice becoming exploited as an ideology – a science of ideas rather than living faith....Those for whom Church teaching is only an 'idea' – we call them*

'idealogues' – lose contact with and withhold compassion from the wider reality – the fragile, fractured, wounded and sometimes bleeding body of Christ, which is his Church.

Cardinal Reinhard Marx, the archbishop of Munich and one of the eight cardinals Pope Francis has chosen to advise him, observed recently in the German weekly newspaper, 'Die Zeit': *"in the final instance, and institution which no longer serves but only strengthens and fattens itself is bad for everyone... We need more supervision, more control and responsibility – and in this respect, there is nothing to stop the Church learning from the world."*

One of the most important tasks of Pope Francis has been proclaimed to be the reform of his own government, the Curia, which has clearly run away from itself and ostracised so many people to the point that they can no longer be part of a church which is dictating and judgmental.

From Basil Loftus: *As Francis moves to re-establish this apostolic concept of the Church as the People of God he carefully distinguishes the Church from the Holy See: "This is the Church, a word that's different from the Holy See, which has an important function, but which is at the service of the Church." And for Francis the whole emphasis which we have lived through of ultramontane idolisation of the Holy See and the Vatican by the humble Church of the periphery, is a disgrace and a catastrophe... Again and again he has re-iterated his conviction that as Pope, he is superior to no-one in or outside the Church. He makes the title 'servant of the servants of God' meaningful for the Pope and for all bishops and priests.... We have a new Pope who sees the Church as a prisoner of its own petty-minded past and who is determined to break free of single-issue fanaticism.*

e) Unwillingness to make sacrifices

How many people refuse to recognise their responsibilities to each other, even members of their own families? Elderly parents and young children are often neglected or abused in one way or another, and each day we see examples of horrific events that take place regularly within families, and the treatment they mete out to each other. At the heart of love is service and sacrifice, but the climate militates against it. We do not see or accept that we have a duty to each other as human beings, especially to those among us far and near in need. Look again at Appendix 2. The 'credit card' charitable giving may satisfy our guilt but it is painless and hardly noticeable. An unwillingness to put oneself out for another person leads inevitably to a failure to understand the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the price paid by so many of his followers since. We simply do not see the need or satisfy ourselves with what we might call a 'will that do?' mentality. Even to change our Sunday habits to accept the Lord's invitation to 'do this in memory of me' will not be acceptable if it is not 'convenient'.

From Pope Francis: How many people pay a dear price for being committed to the truth? How many honest men and women prefer going against the tide in order not to reject the voice of their conscience, the voice of truth? There are more Christians being imprisoned or killed today than in the early centuries of the Church. Whilst these martyrs represent the greatest example of giving one's life to Christ, there are also 'everyday martyrs' who are not killed but who lose their lives for Jesus by giving up their own egos and desires to serve others. Among these martyrs of everyday are mothers and fathers who put their faith into practice by concretely offering their life for the well-being of the family. Priests and religious men and women too, generously serve God's kingdom, as do young people who selflessly dedicate themselves to caring for children, the disabled, the elderly and others. Young people, do not be afraid of going against the grain, especially when the values and lifestyles being proposed are to rob us of hope and cause people harm like food gone bad. Go on! Be courageous and go against the tide and be proud of doing it!

There will surely be many other reasons why people have stopped going to church, even though they often want to excuse themselves and take offence if you say that they clearly no longer believe. Somehow, to them, being a 'Christian' means being a 'good person' and of course you can always be a 'good person' if you set your own standards and live by your own rules. The thought of being inadequate, irresponsible, or just plain wrong, will never be allowed to enter our psyche. Just ask any teacher who has had to put up with endless complaints from parents, who cannot accept that their 'little darlings' are not all they want them to be, having lavished so much attention and money on them!

Session 3 – A Church without priests

It is not unlikely in future years that there will be hardly any priests in our Church. So what will we do and how will we manage if our model of 'management' is entirely clerically dependent? We may not wish to face up to this scenario but it is a real possibility. A notion of the Church as the 'people of God' includes lay people in management and decision-making, but the clergy will certainly not like relinquishing some of their perceived 'power' or 'authority'. This is at the heart of many of our problems today. For this session, we will show the DVD of "Who Cares about Australia?" It is a play written and produced by a priest and a group of young people ten years ago and actually has nothing to do with 'Australia' at all! It portrays what might happen if a priest left a parish and there was no one to replace him. A group of young people offer to help organise the parish during their 'gap year' and, with the bishop's permission, move into the presbytery together. The play tells what happens when they encounter all sorts of parishioners – 'die hards', unmarried mothers, elderly agnostics, young drug addicts, and the ordinary loving faithful members that you still find in any church community. The results are thought provoking and stimulating for everyone.

Session 4 – Is this anything new?

We begin by discussing the DVD we saw last week and our impressions of it. Could a scenario like this really happen?

The situation described in Sessions 1 & 2 and also in the opening songs of “Mother Mary” (see Appendix 2) is very real but it is also nothing new. Such banality, boredom, secularity has always been present but maybe we did not realise it. Look now at the words of one of T.S.Eliot’s greatest poems, “The Rock”, which was written as long ago as 1934 and Herman Hesse’s essay on Christmas, written in 1917 and see if you can notice any similarities with our present situation. See also Appendix 3 & Appendix 4.

*I journeyed to London, to the timekept City,
Where the River flows, with foreign flotations.
There I was told: we have too many churches,
And too few chop-houses.*

*There I was told: Let the vicars retire.
Men do not need the Church
In the place where they work,
but where they spend their Sundays*

*In the City, we need no bells: Let them waken the suburbs.
I journeyed to the suburbs, and there I was told:
We toil for six days, on the seventh we must motor
to Hindhead, or Maidenhead.
If the weather is foul we stay at home and read the papers.
In industrial districts, there I was told of economic laws.
In the pleasant countryside, there it seemed
That the country now is only fit for picnics,
And the Church does not seem to be wanted
In country or in suburb and in the town, only for important weddings*

*What life have you if you have not life together?
There is no life that is not in community,
And no community not lived in praise of God.
Even the anchorite who meditates alone,
For whom the days and nights repeat the praise of God,
Prays for the Church, the Body of Christ incarnate.
And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads,
And no man knows or cares who is his neighbour
Unless his neighbour makes too much disturbance,
But all dash to and fro in motor cars,*

*Familiar with the roads and settled nowhere.
Nor does the family even move about together,
But every son would have his motor cycle,
And daughters ride away on casual pillions.*

*The Word of the Lord came unto me, saying:
O miserable cities of designing men,
O wretched generation of enlightened men,
Betrayed in the mazes of your ingenuities,
Sold by the proceeds of your proper inventions:
I have given you hands which you turn from worship,
I have given you speech, for endless palaver,
I have given you my Law, and you set up commissions,
I have given you lips, to express friendly sentiments,
I have given you hearts, for reciprocal distrust.
I have given you power of choice, and you only alternate
Between futile speculation and unconsidered action.
Many are engaged in writing books and printing them,
Many desire to see their names in print,
Many read nothing but the race reports.
Much is your reading, but not the Word of God,
Much is your building, but not the house of God.
Will you build me a house of plaster, with corrugated roofing,
to be filled with a litter of Sunday newspapers?*

*O weariness of men who turn from God
To the grandeur of your mind and the glory of your action,
To arts and inventions and daring enterprises,
To schemes of human greatness thoroughly discredited,
Binding the earth and the water to your service,
Exploiting the seas and developing the mountains,
Dividing the stars into common and preferred,
Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,
Engaged in working out a rational morality,
Engaged in printing as many books as possible,
Plotting of happiness and flinging empty bottles,
Turning from your vacancy to fevered enthusiasm
For nation or race or what you call humanity;
Though you forget the way to the Temple,
There is one who remembers the way to your door:*

*Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.
You shall not deny the Stranger.*

*There are those who would build the Temple,
And those who prefer that the Temple should not be built.
And they write innumerable books;
being too vain and distracted for silence,
seeking every one after his own elevation,
and dodging his emptiness*

*If humility and purity be not in the heart, they are not in the home;
and if they are not in the home, they are not in the City.*

*It is hard for those who have never known persecution,
And who have never known a Christian,
To believe these tales of Christian persecution.
It is hard for those who live near a Bank
To doubt the security of their money.
It is hard for those who live near a Police Station
To believe in the triumph of violence.
Do you think that the Faith has conquered the World
And that lions no longer need keepers?
Do you need to be told that whatever has been, can still be?
Do you need to be told that even such modest attainments
As you can boast in the way of polite society
Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe their significance?*

*Men! polish your teeth on rising and retiring;
women! polish your fingernails:
Why should men love the Church? Why should they love her laws ?
She tells them of Life and Death, and of all that they would forget.
She is tender where they would be hard, and hard where they like to be soft.
She tells them of Evil and Sin, and other unpleasant facts.
They constantly try to escape from the darkness outside and within
by dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.
But the man that is will shadow the man that pretends to be.
And the Son of Man was not crucified once for all,
The blood of the martyrs not shed once for all,
The lives of the Saints not given once for all:
But the Son of Man is crucified always
And there shall be Martyrs and Saints.*

From “If the War goes on” –essays by Herman Hesse - “Christmas” (1917)

Except for a few sincerely religious people, our Christmas has long been sheer sentimentality. Or worse, a basis for advertising campaigns, a field for dishonest enterprise, for the manufacture of kitsch. Why? Because for all of us, Christmas, the feast of childlike love, has long ceased to be the expression of genuine feeling. It has become the exact opposite, a substitute for feeling, a cheap imitation. Once a year we behave as though we attached great importance to noble sentiments, as though it rejoiced us to spend money on them. Actually our passing emotion at the real beauty of such feelings may be very great; the greater and more genuine it is, the greater the sentimentality. Sentimentality is our typical attitude towards Christmas and the few other outward occasions on which the vestiges of the Christian order still enter into our lives. Our feeling on such occasions is this: ‘This idea of love is a great thing! How true that only love can redeem us. And what a pity our circumstances allow us the luxury of this noble sentiment only once a year, that our business and other important concerns keep us away from it all the rest of the time!’ Such feeling has all the earmarks of sentimentality. Because it is sentimentality to comfort ourselves with feelings that we do not take seriously enough to make sacrifices for, to convert into actions...Before we celebrate another Christmas, before we try once again to appease our one eternal and truly important yearning with mass-produced imitation sentiment, let us face up to our wretched situation. No idea of principle is to blame for all our wretchedness, for the nullity, the coarseness, the barrenness of our lives, for war and hunger and everything else that is evil and dismal; we ourselves are to blame. And it is only through ourselves, through our insight and our will that a change can come about...The essence of love and beauty and holiness does not reside in Christianity or in antiquity or in Goethe or Tolstoy –it resides in you, in you and me, in each one of us....Light the Christmas candles for your children! Let them sing carols! But don’t delude yourselves, don’t content yourselves year after year with the shabby, pathetic sentimental feeling you have when you celebrate your holidays! Demand more of yourselves! Love and joy and the mysterious thing we call happiness are not over here or over there, they are only within ourselves.

Session 5 – Councils and Creeds

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, which came as a big surprise to everyone and which, even to this day, has not been fully implemented. Our present Pope is making a huge effort to address the problems outlined above by revisiting the Council and its documents, so that we can plan a future for the Church and the world. Here are some words from Bishop Kieran Conry (of Arundel & Brighton) written recently (Catholic Times – October 12 2013) to describe its purpose:

The Second Vatican Council opened on 11th October 1962. It had been announced by Pope John XXIII in January 1959. The Pope had consulted nobody and given no warning of his announcement. He attributed the idea for a Council to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The shock that the announcement caused was rooted in the conviction that the Church was under no particular threat or challenge at the time. This has been the motive for the calling of General Councils up till now. The previous Council the First Vatican Council was called by Pius XI in 1868 to counter the threats of rationalism, materialism and atheism. These words have a curiously modern ring. The Council was never formally concluded and its work was never finished. Although not the only document to emerge from the meetings the only one that is remembered is the Constitution "Pastor Aeternus" ('The Eternal Shepherd'), the document that defined papal infallibility.... So why was the Second Vatican Council called? Pope John XXIII himself said that he wanted to open the windows of the Church and let the wind of the Spirit blow through. He wanted to renew the life of the Church, to bring up to date its teachings, organisation and discipline – the word he used was 'aggiornamento', a 'bringing up to date'. The history of the Council then became a struggle between those who were sympathetic to this view, and even extremely enthusiastic about it, and those who were anxious and resistant to any change within the Church.

History of Councils

The Church is made up of people, of human beings and human beings are often proud, arrogant, insensitive and make mistakes – we are not saints! Even at the time of Our Lord himself, his apostles were arguing about 'which of them was the greatest', the mother of James and John wanted him to promise to have her sons sitting either side of him in heaven, and a rich young man who was 'anxious to justify himself' was told to give away everything he had in order to follow Jesus and couldn't. From the very beginning, therefore, we see problems as the Church grew and developed. Human pride often dictated the nature of professions of faith and huge disputes arose between individuals and groups of people, most notably the West and the East of Christendom. We shall discover this in more detail in Section 2 of our course, but often there was a need to come together as a Church and try to sort out these problems. This gave rise to a series of 'Councils' or assemblies, which began with the Council of Jerusalem as early as AD 50.

In the history of the Church, 'Ecumenical Councils', that is assemblies of large numbers of bishops under the Pope have been relatively rare. Sometimes they were even 'hijacked' by Roman emperors for their own purposes and, as we shall see later, many times over the centuries Church and State came into conflict and this resulted in a 'hardening' of position on both sides, with the Church withdrawing into itself and seeking to reinforce its world-wide status and emphasise its power over the State. This, in effect, is what gave rise to many proclamations and constitutions the relevance of which could be seriously questioned from a theological point of view but the effect of which

was widespread and often disastrous. Let us look briefly at some Councils of the past to illustrate this.

From the outset, Christians were people who believed certain things. The beliefs they expressed in worship and witness, especially about Jesus Christ, were fundamental to the very existence of the Church. The 4th, 5th and 6th centuries were marked by prolonged controversies about how Christ, the Son of God was himself God, and was both God and man. To address these matters, numerous councils of bishops were held and four of them – Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) – came to be accepted as ecumenical (or universal) councils, which were binding on the whole Church. Many creeds or statements of doctrine were produced from them, which became touchstones of orthodoxy throughout most of the Christian world, but many disputes and misunderstanding still arose, particularly between the East and the West. Many of these problems were caused by the misinterpretation or misrepresentation of Scripture, which is always the bench-mark of the Christian faith, and the interference of ‘secular powers’ in the canonical process. In Alexandria, a monk called Arius, at the beginning of the 4th century, denied that Jesus was the Son of God and therefore God himself, and the heresy which came from this belief, Arianism, was widespread and lasted a very long time. Shortly afterwards, the emperor Constantine, became a Christian and thus Christianity became the official religion of the empire and the Church was no longer an ‘underground faith’. It was he, and not the Pope, who convened the bishops to the Council of Nicaea, when Arius was denounced and a new ‘creed’ proclaimed, which was later to become the ‘Nicene Creed’ that we say at Mass, where the troublesome word ‘consubstantial’ or ‘homo-ousios’, entered the debate. It was also Constantine who used his civil power to give the Council’s decrees virtually the status of imperial law, and only in the long term was it recognised that Nicaea had decisively developed its understanding of the divinity of Christ, but its canons were not fully ratified until the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The problem of the ‘three persons in one God’ was addressed by the Council of Constantinople, but a growing division between ‘east’ and ‘west’ would widen after this time and would not be bridged for several centuries. Indeed, one might argue, that it still exists in the Christian Church today. Chalcedon re-affirmed Jesus as completely God and completely man, ‘of one substance’ with the Father and also with human beings, ‘like us in all things except sin’, and born from the Virgin Mary, the ‘God-bearer’ (‘theotokos’), a phrase which would cause a huge rift between the Western and Eastern Church which lasted for centuries and persists to this day.

Two more councils deserve our attention here before we come to Vatican II – the Council of Trent (1545-63) and the First Vatican Council (1869-70), both of which concerned themselves with the authority of the Church and its teaching (‘magisterium’ or ‘tradition’), as a ‘source of revelation’ on a par with sacred scripture. Classic Protestantism claims that the Bible alone contains ‘all things necessary to salvation’,

whereas the Church came to proclaim 'extra ecclesiae nulla salus' – 'there is no salvation outside the Church.' If it has been the error of the Roman church since the Council of Trent to magnify the authority of tradition, independent of the authority of the Bible, modern Protestants have sometimes been guilty of the opposite error – of neglecting tradition altogether, and denying the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life and faith of the Church since the time of the apostles: 'the apostolic tradition'. This tradition is of faith, devotion and spirituality and not just authority and teaching. Trent was called as a response to the Protestant Reformation. The notions of 'transubstantiation', 'justification by faith and works' and several mediaeval practices associated with the Mass were upheld, and the power of the pope was generally increased by giving him the authority to enforce the decrees of the council and requiring that church officials had to promise him obedience. Any hope of reconciliation with the Protestants was effectively killed off, but many of the abuses they had highlighted were in fact dealt with.

The peak of papal power under Pius IX was reached with the opening of the first Vatican Council in 1869, which became a confrontation between conservative and liberal Catholicism. The liberals insisted that the supreme authority in the Church rested with its councils whereas the conservatives held that it was exclusively the prerogative of the pope. The most immediate result of this was of course the publication on 13 July 1870 of the 'dogma' of papal infallibility, but this did not prevent the damage caused by the development of modern thought nor do anything about returning 'temporal' power (ie. over sovereign states) to the pope. Its legacy, however, was to last a very long time and still persists in some quarters today especially where there is an unwillingness to accept the decrees of the Second Vatican Council.

Background to Vatican II

In the early 1960's with the effects of the war well and truly behind, rationing cancelled, the world began to emerge from a period of huge austerity and suffering. There was renewed interest in God and the things of God, and in Britain in particular a large increase in mass attendance, baptism and marriages, and the need for a period of building – churches, schools and centres for the many people who had come as immigrants to meet up. The beginning of a period of decline after 1963 is often attributed to the Council and its decrees, many of which were not accepted or acceptable to clergy and people alike, most notably the very first one, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which decreed that the Mass would now be celebrated in the vernacular, with the priest facing his people whose 'active participation' in the prayer of the Eucharist, was to be promoted above the more 'private' devotion of the previous celebrations, which had been the exclusive prerogative of the celebrant and said in a language that no one could understand. But there was at the same time an enormous social and political upheaval taking place – the development of what has often been called the 'Me Decade', pop culture and music, hallucinogenic drugs to fuel self-expression and enjoyment, 'flower power' as it was

called. Coupled with this was the increasing cynicism of the purpose of the Vietnam war, indeed any war, with anti-war demonstrations taking place in many cities across the world. Traditional religion began to look tired and worn, and the notion of ‘God on our side’ began to become more than a little confused. The assassination of the American President, John F. Kennedy on November 22 1963 literally stopped the world. Whatever his personal failings, he had saved the world from the nuclear abyss, cooled the increasing suspicions of the great powers in regard to each other, and sought to introduce a bill on Civil Rights for all people in his country, black and white alike. A week before the Cuban missile crisis and a year before Kennedy’s assassination, the Council began.

From Basil Loftus After the Council of Trent theological calm and tranquillity reigned in the Catholic Church for some 400 years until the first dawn of the 20th century. Catholics felt safe where they were. They were frightened of moving outside the walls of the ‘citadel church’ or, for that matter, of letting anyone else in. Theologically no progress was being made at all... Then, just over a hundred years ago, Catholics began to move forward spiritually, theologically and liturgically. And they incurred the wrath of Rome. They were utterly silenced (Catholic Times 23rd June 2013).

One of those who were silenced was Fr. Yves Congar OP, a man of incredible intelligence and humility. It is no small irony that he was later called on with Fr. Joseph Ratzinger (late Pope Benedict XVI) to be a ‘peritus’ or ‘expert adviser’ to the Council fathers. In his book, ‘My Journal of the Council’, he said that what he dreaded most was a camp of ultramontane authoritarian and clericalized ecclesiastics, who wanted to control everything and did not want to see anything change, but remain integrally or exactly the same as they had always known it to be... The Council’s great aim was to update the Church’s doctrinal expressions so as to make them potent in a changed world, to invite all Christians into a common search for the unity desired by Christ for His Church and to reform the Church’s way of being in the world. This meant especially its sacramental and ritual life, so that people could enter and understand the rites as agents of liturgical prayer rather than observers of solemn ceremonies. Congar faced much opposition and misunderstanding. A bishop once told him in public: “there is only one presence of Christ in the Church – it is the ‘magisterium’ (teaching authority): the magisterium is what determines everything.”

Basil Loftus comments on this: *That is an attitude to reform in the Church which cannot envisage anything that is not imposed from on high, commanded. It sees reform not as growing out of the particular subject being considered as due for reform – but only as being imposed by an exterior authority. This hyper-authoritarianism is one of the many facets of the mentality that Congar finds so harmful to the connection of the Church with the world... Human rights are not seen as relevant when Church authority is involved... The Catholic Church is seen as a fortress from which to repel invaders from*

other churches and other faiths – rather than as a life boat to take all on board. (Catholic Times 14th October 2012)

Before the Council, the Church had become very centralised, ruled over by the Roman Curia, a group of cardinals, bishops and priest who saw themselves as ‘the Church’ and everyone else as just ‘intruders’ It was their place to uphold, with the Pope, the ‘deposit of faith’, to frame Church teaching and to command respect for and obedience to it from everyone. They liked the power they had and were not about to let it go. Their activities in drawing up themselves the agenda for the council and the drafts to be considered by the bishops were outline by the former editor of ‘The Tablet’, John Wilkins, in an article of October 12 2002:

From John Wilkins: *The Roman Curia, the papal civil service wanted the Council over by Christmas. Then the bishops, ‘those people from outside’ – the Curia called them – could go home and everything would return to normal. But it was not going to be like that. That became clear when the initial drafts prepared by the Roman Curia began to be thrown out, one after another. Now they took hold of the proceedings and made it their council. It was a coup...This is a council as authoritative as Nicaea, according to Pope Paul VI and on the same level as Trent or Vatican I, according to Cardinal Ratzinger. It is the council which Pope John Paul II has called the guiding star of his pontificate. It is not something anyone can afford to neglect or forget. We need to study it. Here is the launching pad for the Church in the third millennium.*

The press had a very definite view as well. The found themselves being excluded from the debates and also ill-informed as to what was going on. Here is the Rome correspondent of ‘The Tablet’ at the time, reflecting in that publication on November 9th 2002.

From Robert Blair Kaiser: *The Roman Curia put everything – all council documents and even the bishop’s speeches – under a seal of secrecy. They barred reporters from the hall...Before the opening they produced some hand-outs implying that this would be nothing more than a pious prayer meeting, and the lazy veterans of the Vatican press corps were inclined to take this misleading information at face value...But Pope John told me he was bringing 2,200 bishops to Rome so that they could not only help him update the Church and heal the divisions within Christendom but alter the Church’s reactionary attitude to the world itself...John XXIII said he did not think people needed any sorting out and he was reluctant to call anyone a heretic. He wanted no condemnations at his council. And everyone was welcome. He told me he was doing everything he could to bring every kind of Christian to his council –including representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, to help him heal a 1,000 year misunderstanding...The rule-makers in the Curia did not want that, principally because they had no sympathy for any radical change in the Church...Consider what happened at*

the Council's first session. The boldest of bishops did not go along with conciliar secrecy for long. They took their cues instead from the Pope, who reminded them on the eve of the Council that he had called it so that the people, and future generations of Christians as well, would be better served...If the Council was to serve the people, then the people had a right to know what was happening there...And when the bishops voted by 2,000 to 200 to put the Mass in the vernacular, the press began to understand where the Church was heading. It was becoming more of a people's Church...With new information, the people of God grew up.

This tone for the council was set by the opening speech of Pope John. After this, there could be no secrecy and no going back. A lecturer at the University of Modena records his reminiscences of the event in 'The Tablet' of November 2nd 2002:

From Alberto Melloni: *What Pope John broke with in his opening speech was a view of history and the world that had been unchallenged for centuries, and which was expressed in preparatory documents for the council drafted mainly by the heads of departments of the Roman Curia. For them, the modern world was an error of history which and produced nothing good. The Church which would shortly become known as 'pre-conciliar' condemned and deplored a world perceived as hostile, lost...Pope John did not think of the council in terms of a plan. He had no agenda as such. It was rather a gathering of the living Church to contemplate 'the Christ Who is always resplendent as the centre of history and of life...and it sees that updating is needed not so much that the Church can survive in adverse circumstances or come to terms with a hostile age, but in order to encounter Jesus Christ more deeply: the Lord Who acts in every place and is present in every human condition...Rather than asking the council to make yet another negative moral evaluation of the world, therefore, he was asking the bishops to discern how, 'in the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order in human relations'...In his speech to the Council which was about to begin, Roncalli therefore answered the question of why such an assembly was necessary in the first place. It was not to be a 'discussion of one article or another of fundamental doctrine of the Church which has repeatedly been taught by the Fathers and by ancient and modern theologians. 'For this, said Pope John, 'a council was not necessary.' The need rather was for the Church to dedicate itself 'earnestly and fearlessly to the work which our age demands of us. 'The Church must leap ahead in order to catch up...'Today, he said, 'the Bride of Christ would rather make use of the medicine of mercy rather than the weapons of severity...the Church considers that it meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of its teaching rather than by condemnations'...That evening, Pope John went out on to his balcony and addressed the crowd assembled before him: 'My person is not important. It is a brother who speaks to you, a brother who has become a father by the will of Our Lord but all of it, brotherhood and fatherhood is by the grace of God. Everything is, everything! Let us then continue to love each other like*

this: and in our encounter let us grasp that which unites us, leaving aside, if necessary, anything that could be a source of difficulty between us. 'Taken together the speech to the council and the evening appearance at his balcony presented the world's bishops with a vision that was bold and simple, challenging and reassuring: that history and time, with all their contradictions and tragedies, hopes and desires, could impel the Church to a greater faithfulness to the gospel and the Church, in turn, could offer the world a more human life. In that speech the council was freed from the burden of having to repeat an immense and obsolete repertory of condemnations.

Why do these words and the emphasis on 'mercy' and 'brotherhood' sound more than a little familiar to us? It is because we have heard the very same words and seen the very same approach in Pope Francis. One might argue that he has encountered a similar situation to Pope John today, with an intransigent and over-centralised Curia, unwilling to change and choking the life out of the Church. Francis is the 'John' of the 21st century, in his whole approach, his thinking and speaking. What we see today in our Church therefore, is certainly nothing new, nothing that Pope John did not encounter before. This time, we hope and pray that the stifling and centralising vision of a small number of people at the centre of the Church government will, as a result of the ministry of our new Pope, disappear forever.

Session 6 – The Second Vatican Council

From Bishop Remi De Roo (of Victoria, Canada, a participant at all four sessions of the Council): *While participating in all four sessions of Vatican II, I was led through the steepest and most exhilarating learning curve of my entire life. I witnessed what Blessed John XXIII called a New Pentecost...He wanted a council that moved beyond the limited spheres of doctrine to become truly 'pastoral', that is, to embrace the whole of life. 'Good Pope John' invited the Council Fathers to set aside severity and condemnation in favour of the medicine of mercy and compassion.....Through this ecumenical council experience of divine grace, my own spirituality was broadened and enhanced. I felt called beyond a morality of commandments and precepts into discipleship and co-responsibility anchored in the Beatitudes...My early spirituality was based on the fear of damnation and unquestioning obedience to Church laws. It was nourished by passive attendance at Mass and the pursuit of special devotions.....I now see action on behalf of justice as an essential element of Gospel proclamation. Freedom of conscience and dialogue trump coercion. My formerly separate Christian sisters and brothers are no longer people in error but partners in promoting the Gospel. Even the members of other world religions and unbelievers of good will are in some mysterious way linked to the Paschal Mystery, equally loved by God. I know now that my immediate faith family, the local Church, in communion with the Church over which presides the Bishop of Rome, has all the gifts and the powers necessary for its growth and spiritual well-being. I am*

aware that the fullness of revelation, while transmitted through tradition and the sacred Scriptures, is ultimately experienced by relating to the person of Jesus, the Risen Lord....Such is the message of hope which Vatican II continues to proclaim. (The Tablet, 5 January 2013)

From Dominic Milroy OSB... Bishop Emil-Jozef De Smedt of Bruges declared in the first session of the Second Vatican Council that it was time for the Church to break free from its legacy of 'Triumphalism, Clericalism and Legalism' ...The terms....were carefully chosen. The Church's style was deeply coloured by its history as a European monarchy, competing and negotiating with other monarchies, and expressing its identity through the traditional symbols of monarchy. Its administrative and decision-making structures were dominated by a powerful 'clerical' caste with its own deeply entrenched juridical system.....The successive battles over the texts of Vatican II's doctrinal and pastoral constitutions represented a very significant confrontation between two powerful currents of thought within the Church, 'fundamentalist' ...which likes to claim 'ownership' of the truth, is distrustful of dialogue and prefers the safety of known tradition to the risks of innovation, and the 'open' spirit of enquiry. When the Council opened many took it for granted that this (the fundamentalist way) was the way that the Catholic Church did its business and were amazed when the proposed drafts were, one after another, thrown out.... The Church, instead of opting out of the secular world, was travelling with it on its pilgrim way, helping to shape the collective conscience in a context of challenging uncertainty. This was certainly how the generation of believers formed by Vatican II perceived things. They did not feel that their faith was 'threatened' by the encounter with the complex issues of modernity, by rather enriched and invigorated by it....It now seemed possible that the issues facing both the Church and the world could be faced in a 'modern' way without fear and in a spirit of transparency. The generation of Vatican II may perhaps be forgiven for feeling, 50 years on, a certain sense of disappointment. The vision seems to have become blurred. The wish to share the joys and hopes, grief and anguish of the world seems to be giving way to a new-found wish to reassert Catholic 'identity' over and against a largely alien world.....The questions raised by Bishop De Smedt have not gone away. The centralised pre-conciliar structures of power and of decision-making, the sense of clerical 'caste' and the curious Catholic version of the modern cult of celebrity still seem to loom larger than the deeper underlying challenges.... The Church has problems that are well-known to everyone and which echo those of society in general. Problems of family and sexual morality, the decline in Catholic practice, the incidence of sexual abuse, the shortage of candidates for the celibate priesthood, the shift in the perception of women's role in society, the widespread 'popular' protest against some aspects of global capitalism, the concern for the long-term care of our planet and the unconvincing progress in ecumenical dialogue – these are complex challenges that Catholics think and care about. Such Catholics often wonder whether the Church, not as a top-down institution but as the prophetic people of

God journeying together, might find some way of addressing these challenges more openly and with the risky confidence that made Vatican II so exhilarating. (The Tablet, 12 January 2013)

The Council documents

The Council itself produced many documents, four of which stand out: on the Liturgy, Divine Revelation, the Church, and the relationship between the Church and the modern world. In hindsight we can see that much of the opposition to the decrees of the Council may have been averted, had the basic document on the Church, which proclaimed “the Church is the People of God” been issued before that on the Liturgy, which it clearly underpinned. We will dwell briefly on seven of the documents here.

The document on the liturgy. Its overarching principle was to promote the participation of the faithful in divine worship. The Mass would now be in English as well as in Latin, and the people should take part in the celebration of the liturgy ‘fully aware of what they were doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by its effects.’ This was also expressive of the way the Church defined itself as a Communion of Communion. Each local Church is the whole Church in that place; it is not a department run from the Roman centre. So each local Church celebrates the prayer of the Church, the Mass, in the language of its own country, because it has to make the faith incarnate in its own local culture. For many people, the whole Council was summed up in this decree and ‘the changes’ as they came to be called were a source of great misunderstanding and tension for years to come. The understanding of the Mass as a ‘sacrifice’ was now conflicting with that of it as a ‘meal’, the first more characteristic of pre-conciliar celebrations and the latter of those that developed afterwards. One might argue that with the ‘democratization’ of the liturgy much personal piety has been lost, but on the other hand, it is now much more inclusive of everyone, despite the efforts of the translators of the New Missal to bring us back to a previous way of worship.

From Basil Loftus ...our ‘full, conscious, active participation in liturgical celebrations’ does not stand alone. It is the articulation of the full, conscious and active participation in Christ’s life on earth which we practise in our everyday lives. The document goes on, “both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify. Christian people, as far as possible should be able to understand them with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, as befits a community.” ...Vatican II realised that the liturgy which is meant to bring the humanised history of salvation into our midst, was failing to achieve that goal, was keeping Christ invisible in heaven, when he should be visible and easily accessible on earth....

The Constitution on the Church. The most significant document of the Council was passed by 2,152 votes to 5. The pyramid model of the Church – pope at the top, then

bishops, then clergy, then lay people at the bottom – was superseded. A circular model took its place: all the people as the body of Christ, with pope, bishops and clergy inside the circle at the centre, serving the whole through special ministries. It was, among other things, the empowerment of the laity. Here now was a people's Church, differently structured. It is through the human beings who make up the Church, the members of his Body, that Christ is present in the world, hence the notion of the Church as 'sacrament': the means that God has chosen to bring wholeness and holiness to all humanity, as 'instruments of salvation' for all. No one is too impoverished, diffident or incapacitated to participate in this great task of making Christ present.

From Basil Loftus.. The Council understood itself as a great examination of conscience by the Catholic Church; it wanted ultimately to be an act of penance, of 'conversion' ... There must be an admission that the Council's reform of the Church was necessary. The dogmatic constitution on the nature of the Church and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World were a counter-syllabus to a theology of the Church which was rooted in a ghetto mentality of a fortress-Church that was still allied to a secular world of princes, pomp, colonialisation and imperialism, and the divine right of kings.

The document on the Church in the Modern World. This was one of the greatest documents of the Council, where the work towards justice and peace can now be traced to have originated. The Church had seen itself as a lighted castle, 'the bark of Peter', a perfect society, from which Christian warriors went out to reclaim for Christ a world that had fallen into heresy and secularism. Instead, it now redeemed itself from this rather 'ghetto mentality' and defined itself as a pilgrim with all the men and women of this world. Here was a recovered Christian humanism. It begins, 'the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men and women of this age – especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted – these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.' The vision set out here was largely that of the French Dominican, Fr. Marie-Dominique Chenu, who had for three decades been promoting the need for the Church to read the 'signs of the times' and find its true place in the world, speaking once again the Word of God to the whole of humanity.

The document on God's revelation. This says that everything is grounded in the mystery of God's revelation of himself to us. We are only God's people because God has spoken and acted in human history to make himself known to our benefit. The basic problem was this: was God's revelation a matter of propositions, the disclosure of truths, or was it something personal, God's revealing himself? Did this God manifest himself in the words of the Bible or in the events of the history of salvation? Not only did the Council teach that God reveals himself in word and deeds but it also illustrated the inner relationship between word and deed. In Hebrew, the word for both 'dabar' is the same. Furthermore, God's revelation is not lost to us after the death and resurrection of Christ

but is transmitted through the generations. Jesus' command to preach the gospel was fulfilled in the preaching of the apostles and by those who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, committed that message to writing. Scripture and tradition therefore are not separate but flow from one single source in the gospel. Scripture, Tradition and the teaching of the bishops who succeed the apostles are so united that one cannot stand without the others. The document also opened the way to biblical scholarship, so long neglected and suspected in the Catholic tradition, and placed the use of critical methods as a way of interpreting the Scriptures in a much more important place than it had occupied previously.

The document on ecumenism. This was based on baptism in the name of the Trinity being the seal of every Christian and thus the foundation of hopes for unity; what motivated the fathers in their deliberations regarding Church unity and the ecumenical movement was their renewed understanding of the Church as 'communion' as laid out in the document on the Church itself. Pope John was determined to encourage Catholics to embrace the modern ecumenical movement, and this was one of the primary aims of his council. Hence representatives from all Christian denominations were invited to attend the Council as observers, and throughout the Council they were briefed and consulted. The Council saw the Church as the 'people of God' moving forward on pilgrimage, with ecumenism as part of its organic life and work and not just an appendix to it, and the decrees stated categorically: 'there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from the renewal of the inner life of our minds, from self-denial and an unstinted love that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way.'

From Basil Loftus... Vatican II clearly identified the movement for Christian unity as something separate from the conversion of individual Christians to the Catholic Church. Of equal importance is the recognition that other Christian Churches are not necessarily meant to institutionally gobbled up by Catholicism.....Vatican II shook the Church. Shake the tree and the bits of it that are ready to come off will do so. There are dead branches on any tree, including the tree of the hierarchy of truth. As a result we have, after Vatican II a church which is more vigorous and more faithful to the truth. We see this for instance in its new relationship with other Christian and indeed non-Christian churches, in its vindication of religious freedom, and in the reform of a liturgy which had become too 'heavenly' to be of any earthly use.

The declaration on religious liberty. This represented something of a U-turn. Gregory XVI had previously said that freedom of conscience was a 'false and absurd or rather mad' idea. He had been particularly scathing about the freedom of the press – 'the most outrageous liberty' he had called it, 'an execrable liberty, which can never inspire insufficient horror'. This meant the end of the previous Catholic doctrine of 'toleration' of non-Catholics and its replacement by an attitude of respect and affirmation. The effects of the way Catholics see other Christians, other religions and unbelievers have

been enormous. ever since, despite modern suspicion of other faiths occasioned by terrorist activities.

The document on the non-Christian religions. This laid the ground work for a positive attitude to the world's great faiths, and above all, to Judaism. There can be no worse accusation than that of killing the Son of God, and ever since then the Church had taught that Jews were evil and deserved to suffer. The decree absolved the Jews as a whole from this guilt and acknowledged the validity of Judaism, declaring that God holds all Jews most dear. As a result inter-faith dialogue is now taken for granted and has become a new creed as much as concern for environmental sustainability, and Jewish-Christian dialogue has become the template for relations with other world faiths.

So what happened next?

The bishops duly went home after four sessions of the Council and the documents were promulgated and published, and then what? Much of the hope and optimism disappeared before terribly long as the government of the Church were determined not to put these decrees fully into action. It was a sad and sorry situation, and it was only a few years later that an episode happened which was to change the attitude to the Catholic Church forever both from within and without – the publication by Pope Paul VI in 1968 of his encyclical letter, “*Humanae Vitae*” (“The Transmission of Life”), which reaffirmed the Church's ban on artificial contraception. Catholics had been waiting for a long time for this decision and many of them had decided that contraception to space their families and nurture the love of spouses which would then flow out to the children and the world, was an aid to their marriages. They knew that the advisory commission set up by Pope John and enlarged by Pope Paul had come to the overwhelming conclusion that the traditional doctrinal line could not be held. But the Pope had also set up a ‘minority commission’ filled largely with clergy who advised the opposite and in the end he took their advice rather than that of the majority and the encyclical was published. For many it provoked consternation and despair. Some bishops’ conferences ‘filtered’ its decrees which claimed that each act of artificial contraception was ‘intrinsically evil’ and that every act of love between a married couple should be ‘open to the transmission of life’, and others stressed the importance of using one's ‘conscience’ to make these ethical decisions. Certainly, from that time to this it has never been a matter raised in the confessional, never! It caused a huge ethical debate about what was right and wrong – ‘natural law’ versus ‘situation ethics’ – indicated that the Pope had in fact ‘acted alone’ without any reference to collegiality, and gave the Church in the media the reputation of being obsessed with matters sexual. Only now, all these years later, is Pope Francis addressing the question by emphasising that these matters, while of great significance, should not be seen as of the greatest importance, which is the preaching of the Word of God.

From John Wilkins The Second Vatican Council has had an enormous effect on the Catholic Church. Why is it then, when so much has been accomplished, that there is nevertheless a sense of shortfall, of unfinished business? Already in 1969, only a few years after the Council had ended, Cardinal Suenens of Belgium was warning that the perspectives of Vatican II, of which he had been one of the architects, were being lost. .. The Council had set out the principle that the Catholic Church was governed by the college of bishops with and under the Pope. Cardinal Suenens commented: "While we emphasise that the Pope has a right to speak and act alone, the word 'alone' never means 'separately, or 'in isolation'The individual churches – through their bishops gathered in episcopal conferences – should be consulted publicly and collectively and enabled to collaborate in documents that vitally affect the whole Church...Encyclicals and important documents from the Holy See should be seen by everyone as the result of a collaboration between Rome and the individual churches." The trouble is that the Council imposed no structure sufficient to guarantee collegial government of the Church... The council stated that the Synod of Bishops would be the collegial instrument to assist the Pope and Pope Paul VI duly moved to set it up. But these synods have come under the complete control of the Roman Curia – contrary to the intentions of the bishops of Vatican II, who wanted them to exemplify the freedom from that control that they themselves had won. Synodal assemblies should be great moments of teaching for the whole Church but they are not....Journalists are not the flavour of the month. We are allowed into the synod hall under strict supervision, for the prayers that open each session, and as soon as they have ended we are shepherded out again like bearers of the plague....

Over the years there has been ample evidence that where synods of bishops were to take place, the Curia prepared the documents for discussion, ignoring what had been sent in to them from the bishops' conferences, and that they even 'doctored' the final documents issued from the synods, having prepared them in advance. The participation and counsel of the bishops present, therefore, counted for nothing. Furthermore, those who were selected to be bishops had to meet certain 'criteria' laid down by the Curia – loyal, faithful, obedient to Rome and proposing ecclesiastical matters such as conformity on clerical dress, and worship as being of the paramount importance, in other words to be 'safe'. The movement of 'aggiornamento' of Vatican II thus came to an abrupt halt.

John Wilkins continues ...Where Vatican II envisaged decentralisation, we have centralisation. Why has the doctrine of collegiality been turned on its head? For the council, collegiality meant that the focus was on the team; for Pope John Paul II, collegiality means that the focus is on the captain.....The Pope always governs the Church freely according to his own conscience. The overall and ultimate responsibility is his. But he cannot do so apart from the college of bishops which he leads. The bishops are not only vicars of Christ in their own dioceses, but, according to Vatican II, the are

co-responsible for the universal Church. Hence the importance of their being free to speak the truth within Catholic obedience. They are not meant to be courtiers....Sooner or later a pope must surely move to make synods less of a rubber stamp and to bring the papal civil service, the Curia, back where it belongs in the Vatican II perspective – as the servant of the Pope, not as the master of the bishops....The principle of collegiality is essential at every level to embody the conciliar image of the Church as the People of God. There has to be trust in both directions – from the hierarchy towards the people, with anyone who is competent having the right to express an opinion publicly, and from the people towards the hierarchy. If that mutual trust breaks down, the Vatican II vision of the Church as the people of God being led by the Spirit is lost....The principle of subsidiarity holds that what a small community can do well by itself should not be taken from it and assigned to a larger community....There are calls nowadays for a third Vatican Council. But that is not needed yet. What is needed is more collegiality. For that a Vatican III is unnecessary. Forty years after it first met, the Second Vatican Council is more than enough to be getting on with” (The Tablet October 19 2001)

Thankfully, the vision of our present pope is very different from that of his predecessors and we can clearly see from his interviews that his thinking is very much in accord with what the fathers of Vatican II intended:

From Pope Francis: *Prayer for me is always a prayer full of memory, of recollection, even the memory of my own history of what the Lord has done in his Church or in a particular parish....and I ask myself: what have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What should I do for Christ?. But above all, I also know that the Lord remembers me. I can forget about him, but I know that he never ever forgets me.... “All the faithful, considered as a whole are infallible in matters of belief and the people display this (infallibility of belief) ...through a supernatural sense of the faith of all people walking together...When the dialogue among the people and the bishops and the Pope goes down this road and is genuine, then it is assisted by the Holy Spirit. So this ‘thinking with the Church’ does not concern theologians (alone)....We should not even think, therefore, that ‘thinking with the Church’ means only thinking with the hierarchy of the Church.....what is important for the Church here today is a spiritual discernment that responds to a need that arises from looking at things, at people and from reading the signs of the times. I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and warm the hearts of the faithful....and you have to start from the ground up.*

Catholics of every culture, language and part of the world are united in their common baptism and in sharing the Church’s one faith and sacramental life....This helps the Catholics to feel like members of one family united no matter what the distance between them....It’s sad to see a privatised Church because of egoism and this lack of faith. It is especially sad when there are so many fellow Christians in the world who are suffering or being persecuted because of their faith. Am I indifferent to it or is it like someone in

the family is suffering?...How many of you pray for Christians who are persecuted and for those in difficulty for professing and defending the faith? It's important to look beyond one's own fence, to feel oneself as Church, one family of God...sometimes misunderstandings, conflicts, tensions and divisions crop up that harm (unity) and so the Church doesn't have the face we would want, it doesn't demonstrate the love God wants."

From Basil Loftus ...*Those who follow the Tridentine liturgy do so in perfect freedom and are entitled to the esteem of all Christians. But it is not acceptable for them to proselytise for the imposition of this unreformed liturgy on others. It is not acceptable that they should use their own liturgical position as a vantage point from which to pour scorn on the reformed rite of the Mass, which the Council decreed was to be 'revised...the rites are to be simplified...elements...are not to be discarded...other elements are now to be restored.'* and all this so that *'devout and active participation by the faithful can be more easily accomplished.'*....

Reform can be the only common agenda between varying post-conciliar factions in the Church – because of its very nature the Church is always in need of reform. But it is the understanding of what 'reform' is that lies at the root of the problem. True reform must grow out of the living together of Church and world. It cannot be imposed by the Church.... Today, as followers of Christ, we are not seeking safety in a Church which protects us, but we are exploring dogma, church regulations and moral law under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who inspires us. We are today picking up the baton which was handed on to Vatican II by the modernists and reforming Catholic theologians of the previous 50 years. That baton has been dropped in recent years, almost lost without trace, but now, half a century on from Vatican II, it has been found, picked up and handed to us. The race for the kingdom of heaven has resumed. and all of this is thanks in very large part to Holy Father Francis, who told us on June 12th this year: "the temptation is to go backwards, because we are 'safer' going back; but total security in the Holy Spirit that brings you forward...this is more demanding because....it does not give us human security. We cannot control the Holy Spirit, that is the problem!...The law of the Spirit takes us on a path of continuous discernment to do the will of God, and this can frighten us." ...Today Pope Francis is repeating again and again his plea that the doors of the Church should be open....If truly our Catholicism is to live, it must not be strangled in its growth by fear of condemnation, fear of the Spirit, and a retreat to 'safety.

We have gone this far of course without fully mentioning the problem that, more than any other, has called into question the integrity and sincerity of the Catholic Church, namely that of the abuse of children by priests, religious and laity in positions of trust and the consequent perceived 'cover-up' that followed on its being discovered and brought to light often by many 'victims, who had hidden their suffering or not fully realised the

extent of it for very many years. How can anyone wish to be part of a Church whose ministers treat vulnerable children in this horrific way and then deny it repeatedly? How can anyone trust the authority of bishops and senior clerics who wish to hide the perpetrators and simply move them somewhere else in the mistaken assumption that they had just 'blotted their copybook'. Thousands of people have left the Church because of this and the claims made by the Council have often been rendered hollow and insincere as a result. There is no doubt that many men of a paedophile tendency found their way into the priesthood at a time when screening was in its infancy and such difficulties never came across the horizon of the Church and society alike. Nevertheless, once it had been brought so painfully into the open some years ago, there was simply no excuse for covering it up to continue; indeed this then became most reprehensible and the Church lost much of its credibility as a result. This is to say nothing of the suffering of innocent victims and of those priests, entirely without blame, who feel so tainted by the sins of their brothers (see Appendix 5). Even though the Church is perhaps the only institution to have faced up to its demons, its future is continually called into question because of the activities, sexual and otherwise, of abuse by those entrusted with its mission. It may be that it will never recover, despite the efforts and ministry of a wonderful Pope and very many hard-working and honest ministers of the Word of God, who is Jesus Christ.

SECTION 2

Session 1 “As it was in the beginning...”

In Section 1 we looked at current problems in the Church and the time in which we are living at the moment. Now is the time to go back to the beginning where we will see that exactly the same problems actually existed in the first place. Human nature has always been human nature! We see also how the Church evolved from being a ‘community of believers’ to a large institution with copious rules and regulations, disputes and doctrinal problems, but also much concern for others and their welfare. We will trace the history of the Church through the New Testament documents of the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of St. Paul in the first two sessions of this section before picking out the salient events of its history to the present in the rest of this section before looking at where it might be going and our part in its future development in Section 3. Interestingly enough, the word, “church” appears only twice in the gospels, both occasions being in St. Matthew’s gospel:

16:18 “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” - this was read back into the text in order to establish the pre-eminence of Peter among the apostles and endorse his authority in speaking on behalf of Our Lord in the early days of the Church.

18:15-18 “If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain any charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community, and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax-collector” – here we can see another item being ‘read back’ from the early life of the Church: a process and procedure for dealing with those who have ‘done something wrong’. It is quite structured and clear, and places special emphasis on the role of ‘the community’ (ie. the Church) and its ultimate authority in dealing with these matters.

Most of our sources in regard to the early Church and its development comes from the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters from Paul and others to the communities spread throughout the Middle East and eventually in Asia. It is amazing how quickly what we might call a ‘hierarchy’ of authority evolved as also the process for discernment what was and was not in keeping with the gospel of Jesus Christ and his teachings. The assimilation of church teaching to that of Our Lord was always presumed and often given the same importance, which was later to cause many problems in trying to establish precisely what Our Lord is saying to his followers and the direction in which he wanted them to go. The exercise of the ‘magisterium’ over the centuries, its claim to parallel importance with the revelation of sacred scripture and the manner in which it was interpreted and practised, gave rise, as we shall see to most of the problems the Church encountered.

The Acts of the Apostles

Here we see the beginnings of the 'Church', and note several 'themes' through this account of St. Luke, who is also the author of the third gospel. "Acts is a principal source for much of our knowledge of life in the early Christian communities, of the first impact made by the Christian faith on pagan nations, of the primitive beginnings of church organisation, of the early developments of Christology and of the personalities of the apostolic age" (*Introduction to the Jerusalem Bible*). Some of the themes we will discover are:

- Learned and brilliant eloquence of the apostles after Pentecost. Ability to relate events to history of Jewish people and also to speak of Jesus to those with no theistic background
- Astronomical growth in numbers in short period of time
- Living a 'shared life' together
- Courage in the face of adversity
- Evolution of a 'structure', even 'hierarchy'
- Growth of disputes and means used to resolve them
- Missionary journeys of Paul and his friends all over Middle East, ending in Rome

- 1:15 -26** - The election of Matthias to replace Judas- "one who has been with us the whole time" – ie. part of the apostolic tradition. Did they foresee carrying on as Jesus' followers even before the dramatic events of Pentecost?
- 2:1-13** - Pentecost- the birth of the Church
- 2:15-36** - Peter says who Jesus is – "we are witnesses to that" (v.32); "what you see and hear is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (v.33)
- 2:41** - The first conversions – "3,000 added to their number"
- 2:42-27** - The activities of the early Christian community – 'Faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.'" "lived together, shared everything in common"; "went as a body to the temple and met in their house for breaking of bread."
- 3:1-21** - Cures and preaching – accuses Jewish people of the murder of Christ

- 4:20** - Explanation of cures to Jewish Sanhedrin and preaching the name of Jesus in eloquent manner. “We cannot promise to stop teaching what we have seen and heard.” (v.20)
- 4:23-35** - References to ‘the community’ – ‘whole group of believers was united heart and soul.’ Sharing goods, and continuing to ‘testify to the resurrection.’
- 4:14ff** - Increase of numbers of believers because of cures
- 5:40-3** - Release of Peter & John then proclamation of gospel ‘uninterrupted’
- 6:1-7** - Beginnings of distinction between ‘Hebrews’ and ‘Hellenists’ with ensuing problems. Meeting, choosing of ‘delegates’ especially Stephen
- 7:55-7** - Stephen stoned to death – first mention of ‘Saul’.
- 8:2-3** - “bitter persecution of ‘the church’...”, with Saul working for its ‘total destruction.’
- 8:15-16** - ‘laying on of hands’ on Samaritans who ‘received the Holy Spirit’
- 9:1-20** - Conversion of Saul – based on vision, “I am Jesus and you are persecuting me.” Then Paul proclaims, “Jesus is the Son of God”.
- 9:26** - Paul tries to join disciples who are afraid of him; friendship with Barnabas convinces them.
- 10:34** - Peter at the house of Roman, Cornelius, “God has no favourites”
- 10:42-43** - Establishment of authenticity – “we are those witnesses”; “all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through his name.”
- 10:45** - Jewish people ‘astonished’ that Spirit came down on the pagans too
- 11:1-26** - Dispute between Jewish and Greek converts. Large number of converts at Antioch. Church established there. Barnabas sent from Jerusalem to verify it. “It was an Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christians’ “
- 11:29** - Sign of ‘relief’ work as integral to their mission.

- 12:1-5** - Herod started persecuting certain members of 'the Church'. James beheaded. First disciple to suffer martyrdom, maybe 44AD
- 12:12** - Peter escapes prison and goes to the house of 'John Mark' – possibly the author of St.Mark's gospel
- 13:1ff** - 'prophets and teachers' in the Church at Antioch. "The Holy Spirit said..." – indication of a revelation from above to begin mission of Barnabas and Saul. Branching out to Cyprus and Perga then back to Antioch. Paul preaches before the 'Jews', - "this message of salvation is meant for you" (v.27) - beginnings of outright opposition and persecution, whereas 'the pagans' were "filled with joy and the Holy Spirit" (v.53)
- 14:1-28** - Pattern of going through the Middle East to places and speaking in the synagogue first. Jewish opposition intensifies and Paul and Barnabas are followed around. Return to Antioch and then "assembled the church"
- 15:1-36** - Controversy about 'circumcision' evolves. Decision to return to Jerusalem to 'discuss the matter' with the other apostles (v.2). "Apostles and elders met to look into the matter" (v.6) Peter's central role in the decision making (vv.7-12), then James – "I rule that..."(v.19). Choice of 'delegates' to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas and instructions from the 'whole church'. Reference to others who caused the trouble – "they acted without any authority from us" (v.24). "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves" (v.28) – direct link between the 'teaching of the apostles' and the will of God himself. Here we see the beginnings of what we now call, the 'Magisterium' or the teaching authority of the Church, which as a means of revelation of God, was placed subsequently on a par with the revelations received in sacred scripture.
- 15:39** - Violent quarrel between Paul and Barnabas who part company – "egos" begin to surface!
- 16:4** - "they passed on the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, with instructions to respect them"
- 16:7** - "told by the Holy Spirit not to preach in Asia"

- 16:1ff** - Arrival in Philippi, principal city of Macedonia, after Paul had been asked 'in a vision' to go there. Mention of the word 'we' indicates that Luke, the author of Acts was in fact travelling with Paul at the time. Timothy recruited as Paul's companion as well, but had to be circumcised first! Mention of Lydia, a well-to-do woman who became a disciple and was later to play a 'leading role' in the Church. Paul and Silas are thrown into prison, flogged and then released after converting their gaolers.
- 17:1ff** - Journey to Thessalonika and familiar pattern of preaching in the synagogue followed by resentment of the Jews. Better reception in Beroea (v.10)
- 17:16-34** - Paul in Athens, heart of Greek thinking and philosophy. Speaking in synagogue and market places first. Critical 'apologetic' speech to the Council of the Areopagus – key moment in early Church history (vv.22-32)
- 18:1-17** - Foundation of the Church in Corinth, then Ephesus. (19:8-10) Preaching accompanied by 'miracles' then baptism followed.
- 19:8-10** - Foundation of the Church in Ephesus – "and the name of the Lord Jesus came to be held in great honour" (v.17)
- 19:23-41** - Disturbance in Ephesus
- 20:1ff** - Paul continues journeys and send for the 'elders of the church of Ephesus'. He predicts the fate that awaits him in Jerusalem – imprisonment and persecution (v.23), re-affirms his devotion to them (v.26) and warns them what will happen when he is not around (vv.29-32)
- 21: 1ff** - Journeys through Greece and Syria. Warning not to go to Jerusalem (v.4, v.13). Paul arrives in Jerusalem and after seven days is arrested and beaten because of Jewish intervention (vv.27-40) He addresses the Jews of Jerusalem and makes an explanation of his conversion (22:1-21)
- 23:1ff** - Paul speaks to the Sanhedrin. Plot by Jews to kill Paul (vv.12-21) Paul rescued by Roman and sent to the governor of Caesarea vv.23-34)
- 24:1ff** - Paul's trial before the Roman governor and then imprisonment

- 25:1ff** - Paul appeals to Caesar
- 26:1ff** - Paul speaks before the visiting King Agrippa and explains his conversion once again (vv.12-18). Decision made to send him to Rome
- 27-28** - Storm, shipwreck and arrival in Malta.
- 28:11ff** - Setting sail for Rome and arrival
- 28:23** - Paul's declaration to Roman Jews
- 28:30-31** - Acts ends with Paul staying in Rome for 2 years "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete freedom and without hindrance from anyone."

The book of Acts ends with the captivity of Paul in Rome about the years 61-63 AD and says nothing about what eventually happened to him – according to ancient tradition, he was imprisoned for a second time and he was executed about the year 67AD.

Session 2 The Letters of St.Paul

“Paul was born about A.D.10 of a Jewish family living among the ‘Greeks’ at Tarsus, a Roman municipality in Cilicia. He was educated as a Pharisee in Jerusalem and converted about 34 A.D. His letters may be dated from 50-65 and he was imprisoned in Rome from 61-63, set free for want of evidence and his second imprisonment in Rome ended, according to a very ancient tradition, in martyrdom probably in the year 67. Paul’s letters show him as a man of sensitive temperament and warm emotions, completely dedicated to spreading the ‘Good News’ that Christ, by his death and resurrection, was proved to be the one universal saviour of Jew and Greek alike. Crises and controversies led him to explain the message of the gospel in ways adapted to the needs of his readers and so to bring into play his remarkable powers of theological analysis and his grasp of profundities. His letters, in a fluent Greek which was his second mother-tongue, were generally a response to a particular situation in a particular church, and although some passages in them were obviously written after long and careful thought, more often the style suggests spontaneity and urgency. The letters were usually dictated and then signed by Paul with a short personal greeting.If they (the letters) are read in the order in which they were written, the development in Paul’s theological thinking can be seen as he finds expression for further depths and implications in the gospel.’

From: The Introduction to the Letters of St.Paul from the Jerusalem Bible

In the Acts of the Apostles, we find the ‘events’ of the early Church and its many communities, as well as examples of preaching from both Peter and Paul which are of a very developed theological intensity. We can trace the development of the church throughout the Middle East and see the beginnings of a ‘structure’ and ‘hierarchy’ based on the ‘apostles and elders’ of Jerusalem, the ones who had actually been with Jesus and received their mandate directly from him. Paul always saw his own ‘ministry’ in a similar way, albeit after meeting the Lord on the road to Damascus. During his many journeys, once he had established a ‘church’ in a particular city or area, he left it in the hands of ‘overseers’ (later ‘bishops’) and moved on elsewhere, writing letters of encouragement and correction if need be to those churches from elsewhere. These letters demonstrate two things: the development of a ‘theology’ - of the ‘church’, interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus and what it meant, coming to realise who Jesus really is and the place of his followers with him – and instructions, often very practical on how to live the life of discipleship. Time and time again we come across problems that the churches were having, most notably to do with the need or not for circumcision of the new disciples if they were not already Jews, with apostasy, listening to false teachers, immorality and bad conduct. These were addressed in a most ‘authoritative’ way by Paul, whose position in the church had obviously very quickly become a central one. The letters all have a similar structure, beginning with Paul’s greetings (sometimes very particular), his establishing his own position and credibility, words of encouragement and praise (but not always!) leading into the theological exposition of what he wants to say about Jesus and the life of discipleship, before ending with personal greetings, practical and financial matters and a blessing for all his readers.

1 & 2 Thessalonians – A.D. 50-51

1 Thessalonians was written from Corinth when Paul’s companion, Timothy had come back from a second visit to Thessalonika and reported to him on the state of the church there. Besides a series of practical recommendations, it includes Paul’s teachings on death and on the ‘second coming’ of Jesus Christ, expressed in terms of contemporary apocalyptic writing. This passage (1 Thess.4: 13-18) is frequently used today in the Rite of Funerals and will be familiar to many of us. Having established his position and that of his friends (‘it was God who decided that we were fit to be entrusted with the Good News and when we are speaking we are not trying to please men but God’ – 2:4) he gives great praise to the believers in Thessalonika (2:13-16; 3:6-10), and sends them plenty of words of encouragement (3:9-14; 4:1-12). He finishes this letter by speaking of the place of those who are ‘working above you in the Lord as your teachers. Have the greatest respect and affection for them because of their work’ (5:12) and gives instructions to everyone to ‘think of what is best for each other and for the community’ (5:16) So some form of ‘authority’ was clearly already in his mind from this early stage of the Church’s life.

2 Thessalonians, written about a year later, shows that Paul's thought on the same subject had deepened. Again he praise and encourages the converts (1:3-4) and gives practical instructions on how to live their daily lives (3:6-12) and what to do with people who 'refuse to work or live according to the tradition we passed on to you.' (3:6)

1 & 2 Corinthians A.D. 57

Corinth was a great a populous port, a magnet to every sort of philosophy and religion and was also a notorious centre of immorality. Paul's converts in the city were particularly in need of instruction and guidance both about the Good News itself and about the Christian life which it implied. The first letter was written from Ephesus sometime near Easter 57. Shortly afterwards, Paul had to pay a brief visit to Corinth in which he had to take painful disciplinary measures and when later he sent a representative to Corinth instead of going himself, the Corinthians did not accept his authority. He wrote a severe letter, which we do not have and then the letter we know as 2 Corinthians. These two letters contain much information about the urgent problems that faced the church and the important decisions which were made to meet them: questions of morality, about the liturgy and holding of assemblies, the recognition of spiritual gifts and the avoidance of contamination from pagan religions. It was Paul's religious genius to turn what might have remained textbook cases of conscience into the means of exploring the profound doctrines of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love and union with Christ. In 1 Corinthians he appeals to them to 'make up the differences between you, and instead of disagreeing among yourselves, to be united again in your belief and practice,' (1:10-12, 3:1-17), and reminds them that their faith 'should not depend on human philosophy but on the power of God' (2:5). They are to be seen as Christ's servants, 'stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God' (4:1) and he tries to 'bring them to their senses' (4:14). In Chapters 5 and 6 he speaks at length of sexual impropriety and all sorts of immorality with a forthright condemnation of such practices, and in the following chapter gives much misunderstood theology of marriage, which had clearly developed by the time he came to write the letter to the Ephesians (see below). Ironically, his hymn at the end of chapter 12 is often used in the Liturgy of Christian marriage today because of its poetry and theological content. 'This is the ruling that I give in all the churches' (7:17) again indicates to us the authority he has or perceives he has within the church communities because of his calling: 'I personally am free; I am an apostle and have seen Jesus our Lord' (9:1) In this letter also there is a key passage in our understanding of the development of the Eucharist, which is always used in the Mass for Maundy Thursday evening: 'this is what I received from the Lord and in turn passed on to you: that on the same night that he died, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and thanked God for it and broke it and he said : "this is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me"' (11:23-25). Paul then develops a theology of the Church based on the notion of the human body in its many parts, brought together by the

Spirit (12:4-11,12-30) – “you together are Christ’s body, but each of you is a different part of it” – (v.27) – and then identifies a ‘hierarchy of importance’ : apostles, then prophets, then teachers. Similarly, his deep theology of the fact and meaning of the resurrection of Jesus is remarkable given the fact that this was written just over 20 years after the event itself took place (15:1-53). In his second letter, Paul devotes much time to the trials and tribulations he and the other followers of the Lord have experienced (4:7-11; 6:4-10; 11:20-23; 12:10) and speaks honestly and openly about his own characteristics and failings: ‘I, the man who is so humble when he is facing you, but bullies you when at a distance’ (10:2). In 11:22-33 he tells of his sufferings and how these have justified his credibility among the people, and his fears of what he may find when he actually comes to see the Corinthians (12:19-21).

Galatians and Romans A.D. 57-58

These two letters deal with the same problem, but while Galatians is Paul’s response to a particular situation, Romans is more like a systematic treatise. Paul did not found the church in Rome. It was a mixed community and there was a danger that Jewish and non-Jewish converts might look down on each other, and Paul before he actually visited the church in Rome, sent this considered examination of how Judaism and Christianity are related to each other, using the ideas he had developed in the Galatian crisis and further refining them. In both these letters we can see Paul correcting the imbalance of the Greek outlook, which relied too heavily on human reason, just as in his earlier letters he had corrected the imbalance of the Jewish outlook which relied too heavily on the Law.

In Galatians, he rebukes them for their turning away and deciding to follow ‘a different version of the Good News’ (1:6) and gives a humble apology for his own former behaviour (v.13). The division of labour in the early Church is clearly defined here – Peter had been commissioned to preach to the circumcised while Paul was sent to the pagans (2:8-9), a decision ratified at the Council of Jerusalem. Paul stresses that ‘what makes a man righteous is not obedience to the Law but faith in Jesus Christ’ (2:16), and this ‘justification by faith’ remains a constant theme in his thinking. ‘I live now not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me’ explains his notion of closeness to his Saviour born out of his experience on the Damascus road, and at the end of chapter 3 he declares: ‘there are no more distinctions between Jews and Greeks, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus (v.28). He emphasizes what this means practically by warning them, ‘if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you at all...since in Christ Jesus whether you are circumcised or not makes no difference – what matters is faith that makes its power felt through love.’ (5:2,6) The gift of the Spirit clearly supersedes the gift of the Law, and he contrasts ‘self-indulgence’ from the Spirit in a manner that has become familiar to us in 5:16-26 – ‘since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit’ (v.25)

Romans is Paul's great theological treatise, a masterpiece of thinking and reflection, and he states his theme at the very beginning: 'I am not ashamed of the Good News: it is the power of God saving all who have faith – Jews first, but Greeks as well' (1:16). At the end of chapter 1 there is a catalogue of sin and licentiousness that any tabloid might be proud of, but Paul wants to show what can happen when people turn away from God and Jesus Christ: 'pain and suffering will come to every human being who employs himself in evil – Jews first, but Greeks as well; renown and honour and peace will come to everyone who does good – Jews first but Greeks as well. God has no favourites' (2:9-10) Many of his remarks seem to be pointed at Jewish converts some of whom have clung to their own ways of following the law at the expense of personal piety and goodness. In entering the debate on 'circumcision' he speaks of the need for 'circumcision of the heart' (2:29). There follows a long treatise on circumcision and how the need for it has been overtaken by faith in Jesus Christ, the ultimate guarantee of salvation: 'since it is by faith and through Jesus that we have entered this state of grace in which we can boast about looking forward to God's glory' (5:2) The means of this happening – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are detailed and a profound theology of salvation is expounded (6:8-11). The reference to Adam in 5:15ff may lead some of us to think that here was the beginning of a theology of what we have come to call 'original sin' but the personal dynamism of sin is better explained in a remarkable sentence, which is as true today as it ever was: 'I have been sold as a slave to sin. I cannot understand my own behaviour. I fail to carry out the things I want to do and I find myself doing the very things I hate. ...the fact is, I know of nothing good living in me...for the will to do what is good is in me, the performance is not, with the result that instead of doing the things I want to do, I carry out the sinful things that I do not want...what a wretched man I am! Who can rescue me from this body doomed to death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' (7:15, 18-19, 24). A complicated treatise on the Spirit and the life in him follows in chapter 8, with an interesting comment for those who might be tempted to think that baptism and confession of the name of Jesus is an instant and irrevocable step to salvation: 'for we must be content to hope that we shall be saved – our salvation is not in sight, we should not have to be hoping for it if it were' (8:24-25) but 'nothing can come between us and the love of Christ' (v.35), and that is the most important thing of all. He spends much time telling the Jews that they were misguided and failed to see the true meaning of their own tradition(chapters 9-11) and follows this with demonstrating what the life of discipleship should be – using your gifts, living humbly without self-importance and believing in Jesus Christ as Saviour (chapter 12). Rather than separating the Romans from their state, he encourages them to obey the civil authority in chapter 13 and this may be the reason why he was treated with leniency when arrested for the first time. The Romans could really see nothing wrong with him; it was the Jewish people, those whom he previously defended against the Christians, who wanted him out of the way. In chapter 14 we have another familiar reading from the Funeral Rite: ' the life and

death of each of us has its influence on others' (vv.7-12) and this demonstrates Paul's grasp not just of theology but also of poetry and prayer. In his epilogue in chapter 15, Paul refers to himself as a 'priest of Jesus Christ' and this is the first time that the expression is used in reference to the followers of Jesus: 'I am to carry out my priestly duty by bringing the Good News from God to the pagans, and so make them acceptable as an offering made holy by the Spirit' (15:16). We see in chapter 16 how many friends and companions he has accumulated and the growing size of the 'community of faith' in the service of Our Lord.

Philippians A.D.56-57

This is a letter, addressed 'from Paul and Timothy' (1:1) but really containing Paul's thinking, with a lot of 'doctrine' in it, giving news to his converts in Philippi and warning them of some enemies who had worked against Paul elsewhere and who might turn to them next. At the time of writing, Paul was actually in prison, probably in Ephesus, but his faith and enthusiasm is undimmed: 'life to me is Christ...I am caught in this dilemma: I want to be gone and be with Christ, which would be very much the better, but for me to stay alive in this body is a more urgent need for your sake.' (1:23). It includes the very well-known passage in 2:1-11, which was a 'hymn' passing round the liturgical gatherings of the church and then incorporated into the text of his letter. The same applies in Ephesians and Colossians. These 'hymns' were statements and summaries of faith in Jesus and who he is (the most famous of all being John 1:1-14) proclaimed during prayer and the Eucharist and then written down later. He alludes again to the problems within the early communities in regard to circumcision (3:2) and compares it to the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus (3:8). He implores them to 'be united in following my rule of life' (3:17) but does not set himself above them in so doing, and speaks of 'running the race to the finish' (3:12) before the familiar passage of praying for their 'happiness in the Lord' (4:4-9).

Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon A.D. 60-63

All three letters, often known as 'the captivity epistles' were written when Paul was under arrest for the first time in Rome. The news of a crisis at Colossae led Paul to write to the Christians there against the growing belief and trust in celestial and cosmic powers. Paul accepts these powers but only in a limited way because now there is a new order, where Christ is all in all. He rejoices in the fact that 'the Good News is spreading all over the world' (1:6) despite the fact that he is in prison himself struggling 'wearily on, helped only by his power, driving me irresistibly' (1:29). He exhorts them to 'live your whole life according to the Christ you have received' (2:6-7) and warns them against false teaching, speaking about the 'circumcision according to Christ' (v.11) which is entirely different to any physical operation. 'Never let anyone else decide what you should eat or drink' (2:16), he warns. Specific instructions and warnings against personal immorality

follow in chapter 3 and he explains this in a well-known passage: ‘you are God’s chosen race, his saints, he loves you...’ (3:12-17).

About the same time he wrote a fuller and more systematic treatment of the same ideas in his letter to the Ephesians, beginning with a hymn of praise to God (the longest single sentence in the Bible! – 1:3-14) and establishing the central position of Christ and the power of his saving death and resurrection in their lives. To these former pagans, he emphasises, ‘you are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations and Christ Jesus himself as its main cornerstone.’ (2:19-20) and ‘pagans share the same inheritance’ (3:6). In encouraging them to leave aside their former lives, he says: ‘I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to lead lives worthy of your vocation’ (4:1-2) and gives them specific instructions about their lives at home and in society. These letters represent a further reconsideration of themes which he had already explored in earlier letters, eg. marriage. The short letter to Philemon is a personal message and is written in his own handwriting.

1 Timothy, Titus and 2 Timothy A.D.65

These are letters of advice and instruction to two of Paul’s most loyal followers in their work of organising and leading the communities to which he had sent them. The first two seem to have been written from Macedonia and the last from Rome where he began his final imprisonment, hence the constant reference to the end of his life and ministry. Titus is told to ‘appoint elders in every town’ and what sort of people they should be (1:5-9), with specific mention of ‘the president’, or ‘elder in charge (1 Tim.3:1-7) who is to be of sound moral character but also versed in the faith and able to expound it clearly to others, and to have ‘responsibility for the church of God’ (3:6). Some form of experience or training is therefore implied for those who are to be ‘leaders’ of the communities. There are specific moral instructions for older men and women, younger men, and ‘slaves’, who are all told to ‘give up everything that does not lead to God’ (2:12). The position of ‘deacons’ is also highlighted frequently (3:8-10) and it is clear that they were beginning to have a specific role in the church community. He also tells the converts to respect civil authority (3:1-3) and to be ‘polite to all kinds of people’, and ends his letter with some very definite words to his friend: “I want you to be quite uncompromising in teaching all this” (3:8). He goes further in his next letter to Timothy: ‘that is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you’ (1:6), which also gives us an indication of the beginnings of what we now call ‘ordination’. This ‘laying on of hands’ occurs frequently in Acts, when people are set apart for a specific purpose such as the distribution of alms or preaching. Here we are dealing with the passing on of ‘authority’ and ‘mission’ in the service of the Lord, from Paul himself (‘I have been named its herald, apostle and teacher - v.11 - and ‘keep as your pattern the sound teaching you have heard from me’ – v.14 – and ‘you have been trusted to look after something precious; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.’ v.14)

and people like Timothy were the precursors of what we later would call 'bishops'. In 2 Tim. 2 there are lengthy instructions as to how Timothy is to fulfil this mission. A constant theme in these letters is also the need to refute false teachers (1 Tim.1:3-11; 4:1-16; 6:3-10; Titus 1:10-16; 2 Tim.1:14-21). While Paul could be somewhat uncompromising himself, he never lost sight of his own position and background. Time and time again he refers to how he persecuted the Church and therefore had no right to be classed as an apostle, save the fact that the Lord entrusted this task to him (1 Tim.1:12-17)

As a footnote to our individual consideration of Paul's letters, it might be appropriate to trace his thinking on three subjects – the place of women, the state of marriage, and the coming of the 'Day of the Lord' – which indicate to us a 'development' as time went on. We remember that all these documents were written before the gospels were put together and so much of the thinking here finds its echo later on when the accounts of Jesus' life and death and rising are written down by different authors for different audiences at different times.

Women and Marriage

Paul was often accused of being a misogynist because of the perceived negative attitude towards women. He inherited this of course from his Jewish background, where women had a very submissive role, and could not help but take this into his earlier writings. However, much of his thinking was framed by the fact that the 'Day' was coming soon – ie. the second coming of Jesus, and that thus there was no longer any need for marriage unless it was felt to be absolutely necessary. When this did not happen as soon as the early believers thought, there had to be an 'adjustment' in their thinking, as evidenced by Paul's writings in Colossians and Ephesians.

Titus 2:3-6 - 'Older women should behave as though they were religious, with no scandal-mongering, no habitual wine-drinking – they are to be the teachers of the right behaviour and show the younger women how they should love their husbands and love their children, how they are to be sensible and chaste, and how to work in their homes, and be gentle and do as their husbands tell them, so that the message of God is never disgraced.'

1 Tim.2:9-15, 3: 121; 5:3-16 - 'Similarly I direct that women are to wear suitable clothes and to be dressed quietly and modestly, without braided hair or gold and jewellery or expensive clothes; their adornment is to do the sort of works that are proper for women who profess to be religious... ..women must be respectable, not gossips, but sober and quite reliable... ..enrolment (in the church) as a widow is permissible only or a woman at least sixty years old who has had only one husband. She must be a woman known for her good works and for the way in which she has brought up her children,

shown hospitality to strangers and washed the saints' feet, helped people who are in trouble and been active in all kinds of good work...'

1 Cor.7 – long treatise on marriage and celibacy: 'but of you marry it is no sin and it is not a sin for a young girl to get married. They will have their troubles, though in their married life, and I should like to spare you that. Brothers, our time is growing short. Those who have wives should live as though they had none...I say this because the world as we know it, is passing away' (v.31 – see below).

1 Cor.11:4 – about shaving off her hair and wearing a veil!

Col.3:18 – 'wives give way to your husbands as you should in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and treat them with gentleness'. There is clearly a more positive and understanding to 'wives' here than previously and this is echoed in Ephesians:

Eph.5:21-33 – 'wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord...husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy...husbands must love their wives as their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself' (vv.28-30)

“The Day of the Lord”

This is the 'end of the world' when Jesus will come again, and for the early Christians this was going to happen soon as Jesus had promised. This accounts for some of the surprising themes in St.Mark's gospel, and the behaviour of the early communities in Acts, when they sold all their goods and property. However, when it did not happen, the 'urgency' of leaving everything faded and a more long-term theology had to emerge.

2 Tim.1:12 - 'I have no doubt at all that he is able to take care of all that I have entrusted to him until that Day'

1 Thess.5:1-11 - 'you will not be expecting us to write anything to you, brothers, about times and seasons, since you know very well that the Day of the Lord is going to come like a thief in the night.'

2 Thess.2:1-12 – 'to turn now, brother, to the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ and how we shall all be gathered round him; please do not get excited too soon or alarmed by any prediction or rumour or any letter claiming to come from us implying that the Day of the Lord has already arrived' (vv.2-3)

Conclusion

What we see from Acts and the Letters of Paul are a clear description of what life was like in the early 'Church' as it had become and a foretaste of what was to come.

During the course of our reflection, we had a discussion on 'justification by faith' and what it meant for the different Christian churches. In some traditions it is thought that we are 'saved' by faith, in other words, once we have professed our faith in Jesus as our Saviour, we are 'saved' and our future is secured. Our task then becomes a missionary one, namely to bring other people to salvation as well by preaching the gospel. There are drawbacks here however. This 'once for all salvation' does not seem to allow for human nature and plain human sin, in that we can deny what we have professed so many times in our thinking and in our behaviour. We can sit lightly to the Lord we have accepted as our Saviour, and not allow him to influence our personal living. In other traditions, 'salvation' has to be 'earned' by good works, fidelity to the gospel and its communities, and 'obedience' to the teaching of those communities. Within the Catholic tradition, this 'obedience' to the teaching authority as opposed to obedience to one's own conscience had been a very strong, even overpowering feature of the life of discipleship. 'Salvation' in this scenario is a future reality which one can aspire to, and gain, even at the last minute in some cases. This approach does not sit easily with many people, and while recognising that human nature can fail the Lord, this does not mean that we lost sight of his 'grace-filled' offer of salvation to all people, whether they know him or not. Old fashioned 'Catholic guilt' as it was known, was loaded on the faithful by their clergy who wanted to maintain their power and influence over them and thus did so by fear. In this the 'sacramental life' of the believer gained paramount importance, particularly as it was regarded as the exclusive preserve of the clergy. In 'having the sacraments' and being the sole 'administrators' of them, they were perceived, at their own instigation, as having 'the keys to eternal salvation'. In this context, respect for the Word of God as saving us was very low on their list of priorities. Paul puts us right on these matters and it is a pity that many of the later Christian churches did not listen to him in the first place: : 'for we must be content to hope that we shall be saved – our salvation is not in sight, we should not have to be hoping for it if it were' (Rom.8:24-25). The virtue of Christian 'hope' is a well-founded aspiration of what will be, based on what Jesus has achieved by his passion, cross and resurrection, but also contains a sense of incompleteness in that it allows for the fact that we can reject the Lord and his saving grace. Hence Paul's vision here is more realistic in either classic Catholic or evangelical forms of Christianity and is one we should all work towards in the development of the ecumenical movement between us.

Session 3 The Church expands

Paul was not the only pioneer missionary among the early generation of Christians. In spite of the earlier hesitancy of Peter and the other apostles, they too probably travelled far and wide in the cause of Christ. Almost certainly, Peter preached the gospel in Rome and apostle John evangelized long and successfully in the province of Asia. According to more disputed traditions, Mark helped found the church in the city of Alexandria and Thomas is traditionally believed to have taken Christianity to India. This accounts for the

deep-seated faith of many Christian and Catholic people who originate from Kerala in the South of India. It was to be many years later when S. Francis Xavier took the gospel message further north and east to the region of Goa. By the middle of the second century, little more than a hundred years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, flourishing churches existed in nearly all the provinces of Syria and Rome, and even in Alexandria in the east and Carthage in Africa and Gaul (modern-day France). A century later a significant Christian minority existed in almost every province of the empire and also in several countries to the east.

As the 'Jesus movement' grew and spread throughout the Mediterranean world, pressures from inside and outside presented it with a series of important challenges. Internally it had to spell out its foundation charter in terms of membership and develop its structure and leadership. Externally, it had to work out its relations with Judaism and other religions and philosophies, and with the Roman Empire itself. As it came to terms with these challenges during the first three centuries, Christianity began to acquire a recognisable shape and a sense of identity through various features: the New Testament scriptures, concepts of orthodoxy and heresy, the 'rule of faith', and earliest 'creed', the role of bishops, presbyter and deacon, the rise of Rome as a centre of reference and arbitration, patterns of arguments against Jewish and pagan critics, schemes for the instruction of new converts (catechumens) before baptism and the basic outline of the Christian year.

A key development in this process was the 'canonicity' of scripture (from the Greek word 'canon', which meant 'measuring rod') whereby a collection of writings was gathered as the standard or rule of the churches. These were the books read publicly in congregations and regarded as having special authority. The 'gospels' were finally written down by Matthew, Mark and Luke in the period between 65 and 78 A.D. and some twenty years later by S. John. Each had their own 'take' on the life of Jesus and addressed their recollections and stories they had heard about him to particular audiences for a particular reason. John's is the most developed, presenting Jesus as the 'Son of God', in whom the power of the eternal God was breaking out into human history. By the end of the second century, Christian writers felt it vital to spell out which books were to be accepted by the church and which not. Irenaeus had no doubt that there could be only four gospels, and by the early third century a consensus had been reached throughout the church concerning the main contents of the canon. It was to be 367 before the Eastern Church finally arrived at a consensus, and complete canon lists were approved by the African Councils of Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 A.D.).

Early Christianity in no way depended solely upon professional leaders for its practice and growth. Each Christian was both 'priest' and 'missionary'. The churches have been described as the most inclusive and strongest of all the various associations in the Roman world. The distinctions between Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, male and female were in theory, and usually also in practice, abolished in the Christian community. All

were active in sharing the message of Christ with others. The earliest Christians had no special buildings but met in private houses, as mentioned in several places in the New Testament, and some of these houses came to be 'extended' and adapted to take more people assembled there for worship. It would be some time yet before the 'basilicas' as they came to be known were built. The main means of promoting their faith was for Christians public open-air preaching or preaching in synagogues, where it was quite usual for a person to 'take the scroll' and give an interpretation of what it meant for others. This is how Our Lord himself began his preaching as recorded in S.Luke's gospel. Paul went to synagogues as soon as he arrived at every town. But after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70, Jews took strong action against Christians in their midst, and eventually closed synagogues to Christian evangelism. Paul also spoke in the market places of towns arguing philosophically for the faith he now embraced. The personal witness of Christian people was also a very strong factor in leading others to conversion, and was often backed up by outstanding acts of kindness. In a society where kindness, honesty and personal purity were rare, Christians who lived out these virtues were sure to attract comment and even serious enquiry. The martyrs of the second century also had a powerful effect on influencing others. Christian writing to commend the faith to pagans and Jews was well under way by the second century, with Justin Martyr being one of its foremost proponents, as also Origen in the third century. Furthermore, the scriptures were translated into Greek and later Latin and thus became available to countless other people by the year 300. The early followers of Jesus were marked out by their clear convictions about doctrine and ethics. They recognised only one message of salvation, only one God, only one Saviour. Once a person became a follower of "the Way", a new life-style was demanded of him. This exclusiveness of early Christian belief and behaviour attracted many people but it was also a cause of offence, as paganism still maintained a strong grip on people.

The world was as corrupt as it ever had been and the young church soon attracted the unyielding opposition of the ruling authorities. As long as the Church was regarded as a Jewish sect, it was tolerated by the authorities, and for its first thirty years Christianity enjoyed the protection of the Roman law. But when the Church became largely composed of gentiles, it was no longer possible to shelter under the wing of Judaism. Christians refused to participate in the cult of emperor worship and thus became subjects of a series of persecutions. These began under Emperor Nero as early as 64 A.D., who was responsible for the execution of both Peter and Paul in Rome, and by 111-113 A.D. profession of Christianity could be regarded as a capital offence. Seven letters of Ignatius, 'bishop' of Antioch, written when he was on his way to Rome to be executed for being a Christian, survive from the beginning of the second century. One of them is addressed to Polycarp, 'bishop' of Smyrna (now Izmir) who in turn became a martyr at about 156-160. Ignatius believed that he possessed the Holy Spirit's gift of 'prophecy' though he considered himself inferior to the apostles. In his letters, he argued that there

should be one 'bishop' in charge of each congregation, in order to prevent splits in the church and to ensure that the correct beliefs were preserved.

Within the Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox churches, 'bishops' claim apostolic succession, a direct historical lineage dating back to the original 12 apostles. They are seen as those who possess the fullness of priesthood, can ordain clergy and are given responsibility by Christ to govern, teach and sanctify the Body of Christ, members of the faithful. Priests, deacons and lay ministers cooperate and assist their bishops in shepherding a flock. Originally the term 'episcopos' was not clearly distinguished from the term, 'presbyteros' (literally, 'elder', or 'senior', the origin of the modern word, 'priest'), and we first discern its use in the writings of Ignatius at the end of the first century. The earliest organisation of the Church in Jerusalem was, according to most scholars, similar to that of the Jewish synagogues but it had a council of ordained presbyters. In Acts 11:30 and 15:22 we see a system of government chaired by James, according to tradition, the first 'bishop' of the city, and in Acts 14:23, Paul 'ordains' presbyters in churches in Anatolia. Often the word, 'presbyter' was not distinguished from 'overseer' ('episcopos') which later was used exclusively to mean 'bishop'. Many of these people were originally itinerant and given responsibility for the organisation of 'house churches', but it was not long before they were given the task of 'overseers' of local churches (1 Tim 1:3) where they could ordain presbyters/bishops and exercise general oversight and direction (Titus 2:15). Eventually, as the Church grew, bishops no longer directly served individual congregations. Instead the Metropolitan bishop (bishop in a large city) appointed priests to minister to each congregation acting as the bishop's delegate. At the end of the first century, the church's organisation becomes clearer in historical documents. In the works of what were called the 'apostolic fathers' and Ignatius of Antioch in particular, the role of the 'episcopos' or bishop became more important or rather was already very important and clearly defined.

Here are some examples from the writings of S. Ignatius to the Magnesians: "your godly bishop (2:1)...the bishop presiding after the likeness of God and the presbyters after the likeness of the council of Apostles, with deacons having been entrusted with the diaconate of Jesus Christ (6:1) ... Therefore as the Lord did nothing without the Father (being united with him) either by himself or by the apostles, so neither do you do anything without the bishop and the presbyters (7:1)...be obedient to the bishop and to one another (13:2)" It is clear that the bishop was expected to lead the church in each centre of Christian mission, supported by a council of presbyters (a distinct and subordinate position) with a pool of deacons. As the Church continued to expand, new churches in important cities gained their own bishop, and presbyters and deacons were sent by bishops to churches outside the cities. Thus in time, the bishop changed from being the leader of a single church confined to an urban area to being the leader of churches of a given geographical area, the beginnings of what we now call a 'diocese'. At

the end of the second century, bishops were defined as the only clergy to whom the ordination to the priesthood and diaconate is entrusted, and they gradually emerged as undisputed leaders of Christian communities. There was no counterpart to the 'minister' of today in earliest Christianity. The apostles were now seen as the first bishops and bishops were called 'apostles'. Rome acquired the leading position because Peter and Paul were martyred there, it was the centre of the empire and all roads led towards it, and in A.D.70 the city of Jerusalem was destroyed.

Despite periods of persecution, the church continued to grow. The storms of opposition made the flame of the gospel burn all the brighter. Very little is known about the details of church expansion during the second and third centuries. There are glimpses of a lively church, steadily expanding in size and in its influence on society. The faith of a persecuted minority was quietly and gradually becoming a major force in the empire despite the efforts of the emperors Decius (249-251) and Diocletian (284-305) to stifle it, and many parallel 'movements' to undermine it. One of these was known as Montanism after an enthusiastic young Christian called Montanus, who set himself up as a prophet around 170 A.D. in Phrygia. His main message was the nearness of the end and the return of Christ for which Christians needed to be fully prepared by strictly ascetic lives. Such behaviour caused a huge split in the church which lasted for over a century. The emperor Diocletian's persecution of the Church was particularly severe; in 303 he ordered the destruction of all church buildings, confiscation of Christian books, dismissal of Christians from the government and army and imprisonment of the clergy. Many of the martyrs mentioned in the Roman Canon of the Mass (Eucharistic Prayer 1) – Perpetua, Felicity, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes – were put to death at this time. A further edict issued in the next year ordered all Christians to offer sacrifices to the pagan gods, the penalty for not doing which was execution. Many people were martyred, including bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch, and devotion grew to them afterwards for their courage in not renouncing their faith in Christ.

Nevertheless, by the end of the second century the new faith was on the way to becoming the most forceful and compelling movement within the empire. Many of the keenest minds of the day were becoming followers of 'the Way'. A series of Christian writers defended their faith against both popular accusations and more sophisticated attacks. Although most of the writings of these 'apologists' were dedicated to the emperors, their real audience was the educated public of the day. If they could answer the accusations of the enemies of Christianity and point out the inherent weakness of paganism, they hoped this would help to change public opinion concerning the good news and lead to conversions. Men such as Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, the unknown author of the 'Letter to Diognetus' (see Appendix 6) and later Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon and Tertullian, who was born in Carthage in the province of Africa around 150 A.D., all directed their spiritual and intellectual gifts to this cause. They underlined the legal and moral absurdity

of the persecution directed against Christians and offered encouragement to those facing martyrdom. To the east, the city of Alexandria became an intellectual centre for Christianity about the same time, and later Clement and Origen made the crucial contribution of putting over the gospel in terms which could be understood by people familiar with the highest forms of Greek culture, thus establishing the intellectual respectability of the new faith and stressing the importance of biblical scholarship. By the third century, the church extended its frontiers both geographically and socially at an unparalleled rate. It was beginning to assume the proportions of an empire within an empire, hence the time of persecution. Christians were forbidden to hold church meetings, visit cemeteries on pain of death and their leaders were singled out for particularly harsh treatment. Property was confiscated and many of them were imprisoned, reduced to slavery or executed.

About the middle of the third century Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage promoted a view that martyrs were ideal Christians, and of a rather rigorous interpretation of the faith, living a very ascetical life himself, and at this time we hear of Christian 'monks' (eg. S. Antony, who lived in Egypt from 251-356 – a long life!) appearing in Syria and Egypt, who took this asceticism a stage further by forsaking ordinary society for a life and prayer and solitude in the desert.

This whole scenario was about to change dramatically and irrevocably with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine to Christianity in 312. Diocletian had divided the empire into east and west (which division would later happen to the Church itself) before voluntarily retiring to live the life of a gentleman farmer in what we now call Croatia. After a period of division between 'emperors' of east and West, Constantine marched on Rome and became the sole emperor. His conversion shortly afterwards was to have huge implications for the life of the Church and its place in the society of the future. Constantine's defeat of Maxentius at the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 was interpreted by him as a response to his appeal to the Christian God for help. His 'prayer' was answered by a sign – a cross in the noonday sky 'above the sun' and with the words, 'conquer by this'. That night, Christ appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to use the sign – apparently Chi-Rho, the initial letters of the name of Christ in Greek – 'as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies'. So Constantine placed the sign on the shields of his army and conquered his enemy. His allegiance to the Christian faith as a consequence was deep and committed, even though his pagan background meant that he did not fully understand what it meant. This propelled the Church into a new age for which it was not prepared. Out of this new relationship between the Christian Church and the Christian emperor stemmed the history of church/state relations in the later Roman Empire and throughout the Middle Ages.

Session 4 The 'imperial' Church

In this session, in order to avoid repetition, we will need to refer to Session 5 of Section 1 of the course on 'Councils'.

Constantine treated Christianity as the favoured, if not as yet official religion of the empire. He pronounced freedom for worship for all pagans as well as Christians, in the Edict of Milan in 313. He granted immunities to the clergy and lavished gifts on the Church; in his letters and edicts he spoke as if the Christian God were his own. He made the first day of the week (Sunday) a holiday, stimulated interest in the Holy Land, and encouraged the cults of martyrs and saints. The church never went so far as to teach that the saints should be worshipped. It was only suggested that they were in a special position to hear petitions and present them directly to God. He repressed heresies because he felt that strife in the Christian communities was likely to bring down the wrath of God on him and the people entrusted to his care. (*see Appendix 8*) Factions within the Church frequently appealed to him for help in the struggles with each other, and it so emerged that he was somehow 'above' the church. Without previously consulting any bishops, most notably the bishop of Rome, he called the Council of Nicaea, the first 'ecumenical' or general council, in 325 to deal with the heresy of Arius, and presided over the critical session himself, though its effects were sometimes questioned by those who, at the promptings of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, refused to receive repentant Arians back into the community. No one questioned the emperor's authority to intervene in church disputes even if they did not agree with him. As 'pontifex maximus', the emperor enjoyed a monopoly on legislation that extended even to church matters, and he issued laws, professions of faith and other prescriptions regulating the order of the Church. He also revamped the organisation of the Church to conform to that of the empire with the bishoprics of each civil province being placed under the authority of the 'metropolitan' bishop ruling the provincial capital city.

When Christianity became a tolerated religion under Constantine, worship and festivals had not as yet been formalised. Worship was mainly in Greek though in some places Latin had started to be used. With the declaration of Sunday as a holiday, however, a wider development in worship became possible and Sunday services became bigger occasions and worship imported some practices from the court ceremonial. The growth of formality, or ceremonial and even superstition resulted from this, and the places of worship changed dramatically, with the introduction of 'basilicas' as the most suitable buildings available. Extra space was needed for the larger congregations that now gathered for worship and these previously 'civil' building plans were used for this purpose. The house church had usually provided room for the persecuted Christians. Now that Christianity was respectable and officially recognised the numbers of worshippers increased rapidly and bigger accommodation was needed. Worship in the house church

had been of an intimate kind in which all present had taken an active part. But by the beginning of the 4th century the distinction between clergy and lay people was becoming more prominent. About this time, the liturgy changed from being a corporate action of the whole church into a 'service' said by the clergy to which the laity listened, and the basilica pattern made it easier for the distinction between laity and clergy to harden. A throne was set up for the bishop reflecting his position as an imperial servant as much as pastor of the flock. The table for the Lord's supper became a permanent altar at the front of the church, the central space occupied by the choir and the side aisles for the ordinary worshippers. Constantine was responsible for building the first basilica, that of St. John Lateran in Rome and later for ordering basilicas to be built on what were regarded as the sites of the martyrdom of Ss. Peter and Paul. In the Holy Land, basilicas were built on the sites of events in the life of Christ.

Easter became expanded into a week-long festival at the same time as the period of preparation of candidates for baptism was formalised into the forty days of Lent. By the year 600, many festivals had been added to the Christian calendar. As well as the major feasts, saints' days became more common and included not only the apostles, but also the Virgin Mary and various local saints. In the West, Latin had replaced Greek as the language of worship by the mid-4th century, as it was the language of the Roman Empire, and at the end of the 4th century, S. Jerome was to spend 23 years translating the scripture from the original into Latin. By the 5th century, adult believers' baptisms declined and infant baptism became normal. Ordination had now grown into a distinct and important ceremony.

The Christian church was primarily a church of cities for the first centuries of its existence, but by the beginning of the 4th century, it had begun to move into the countryside in the West usually as a result of the preaching tours of bishops, who set up churches in the larger villages in order to care for the new converts. At first, these churches were under the care of the clergy sent out from the city. Only in the 6th century and primarily in Gaul, did each country church come to have its own staff of clergy. Priests in these country churches were still ordained by the city bishop but could administer the sacraments. Hence the church was beginning to take on the form of the local parish ministry familiar in the Middle Ages and modern times. The bishop also controlled the finances of the churches and the clergy of the city. Churches had begun to acquire property by the 3rd century but it was the extraordinary growth of church wealth in the 4th century that changed the pattern of church support. After Constantine, endowments, supplemented by government subsidies, provided the major income, though voluntary offerings remained an important part of church revenue. By the end of the 5th century the church at Rome had devised a system by which all income from rents and offerings was divided into four parts – for bishop, clergy, the poor and for repair and lighting of the churches. Under this system, the bishop received an income much greater

than that of priests and deacons, though he had to spend a considerable amount on hospitality, and a gap also developed between the wealth of the rich and poor churches, which caused many problems.

Meanwhile, the growth in authority of the bishop of Rome was of vital significance. In theory, bishops were equal but from earliest times, some were more prominent than others because of the importance of their cities. Rome's position was due to the pope's position as successor to Peter, the founder of the Roman church. This exalted view, though not for some time accepted even in the West, was the foundation for the eventual supremacy of the bishop of Rome in the church of the Middle Ages. With Constantine as emperor, the Roman church suddenly found itself not only free from persecution but also gifted with churches and estates. In the West, bishops were becoming landed magnates as well as the chief clerics of the church. In the East, however, where the Eastern Roman emperor continued to rule, the process of papal self-inflation was met with only incomprehension and incredulity.

A key figure in this period was S. Ambrose, the civil governor of Milan. He came from a noble Roman family and received a classical education. He became the provincial governor in northern Italy, residing in Milan. Even though he was not even baptised or had any church training he was unanimously elected the Bishop of Milan in 374 A.D. When the people of the city went into the cathedral to elect their new bishop, Ambrose spoke a few words to them to calm them down, and then found himself elected! He tried to escape and hide but eventually was persuaded that this was the will of God. He remained the bishop for 23 years and his influence was great because, at that time, the emperor's residence in the West was in fact in Milan rather than in Rome. He was the first church leader to use his office to successfully coerce civil rulers. He did much to encourage early monasticism in the West and had a considerable part to play in the conversion of St. Augustine, whom he baptised in 387. As a result of Ambrose's influence on the emperor Theodosius, paganism as such effectively disappeared from 394, and the emperor ordered all his subjects to subscribe to the faith brought by Peter to Rome. These encounters between Ambrose and the emperor show a dramatic increase in the power of the church, even to the extent of the emperor having to do public penance for his crimes. Ambrose's answer to the question, 'what has the emperor to do with the church?' was that the emperor was within the church, not above it. However, the emperor in the East at Constantinople kept control of the Eastern Church and occasionally interfered in the West.

At the very beginning of the 5th century, a very significant event happened – the Roman empire in the West fell to the invasion by Germanic barbarian tribes. (The Eastern empire in Constantinople, however, was to stand for another thousand years, and the city of Rome was generally looked down upon as merely the run-down capital of former times) The emperor and his court escaped to Ravenna, and continued to live in magnificence,

while the Goths took the city of Rome in August 410, and, as the barbarians very soon left Rome to its own devices, the only 'governor' in Rome remained the person of its bishop. It is thought that the reason for the invasion happening was the failure of human and material resources. The West had always been poorer than the East and conditions had become worse, with too many non-productive members of society (including monks and the clergy) having to be fed by too few productive labourers. Senators refused to pay their taxes and the size of the army increased disproportionately. While submitting to barbarian political rule, the church also sought to convert the barbarians to orthodox Christianity. This was to prove very important in the relations between Church and State.

In North Africa, the church suffered more from the barbarians after the death of S. Augustine in 430. Augustine is probably the most notable 'personality' of the Church in this period (*see Appendix 9*). A very well educated man, he came to Milan in 384 and met Ambrose, its bishop, from whom he discovered that Christianity could be eloquent and intelligent. He came to believe that the cause of evil, which preoccupied him all his days, lay in the absence of good, and reading St. Paul's letter to the Romans (13:13-14) in his garden in Milan he finally 'saw the light'. Returning to Africa, he was pressured into becoming a priest and then in 396, the Bishop of Hippo. For the rest of his life, he was a preacher and pastor, judge and intercessor, organiser of charity and a tireless defender of catholic orthodoxy and voluminous writer. He developed an influential principle – 'believe in order to understand' – and insisted that the church was a mixed field of wheat and tares, believers and unbelievers, growing together until the harvest. Living among the shocks and disruptions of the disintegrating Roman empire, Augustine taught Christians to endure the world, where evil reigns invincibly and to seek the peace of the heavenly city. In his book, 'The City of God', he wrote that within the Roman Empire, two 'cities' were intertwined: the 'City of God', the community of true Christians living according to God's law, and the City of Man, the pagan society following its own desires and seeking material gain. Such a community could only come to a disastrous end. But to Christians, citizens of the City of God, the sack of Rome was not a catastrophe, in spite of their suffering. The loss of goods can deprive Christians of nothing, since their hearts are set on heavenly things. Suffering and deprivation are part of their Christian instruction. The City of God alone is eternal, yet the two cities will coexist inseparably until the end of the world. Although he regarded Rome as the centre of the empire, all bishops were considered to be equal, and in the 'City of God' the pope is not mentioned at all. However, he also left us with a questionable attitude to sin and where it originates. In his theology, everyone was born into sin and it was traced back to Adam; through him we were enslaved to our carnal, self-centred appetites. This sin was passed through the act of sexual intercourse, so that every new-born infant is doomed to death unless freed from original sin by baptism. In this view, even the slightest sexual desire or overt action, even when meant simply as a token of affection, becomes a grave sin unless performed within marriage and motivated by the intention to produce children. This 'theology' was to have

a profound influence on mediaeval morality and penance and even modern-day teachings which have caused much heartache and pain to countless followers of the Lord.

Another 'personality' of this period was Pope Leo the Great, who became bishop of Rome in 440 A.D., and was the first of such to be referred to as the 'pope', the first to adorn himself with the title previously reserved to emperors of 'pontifex maximus', and the first to be buried in St. Peter's basilica. He advanced the primacy of the Roman church in the west and was the first pope to make extensive use of the text from St. Matthew, "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church", setting out more clearly than any before him that the papacy was Peter's own office, not only as founder but also as present rule of the church through his servant, the pope. He claimed that it did not matter how unworthy any particular pope might be, as long as he was successor of Peter and was acting according to canon law. He took a leading part in the controversies about the nature of Christ in the 5th century, claiming that Christ has a both fully human and divine nature and is not a split personality, which was defined at the Council of Chalcedon in 450. Two years later, Leo increased his personal prestige by persuading Attila the Hun to turn back from Rome, and later managed to limit the damage done to the city when it was captured by the Vandals in 455. The Roman bishop was beginning to act as a civil ruler. But his ideas carried no weight in the Eastern Church which, even then, was the most important one. By the end of the 5th century the bishop of Rome, Gelasius 1 had developed the view that the emperor was directly subject to the head of the church, the bishop of Rome (or pope) and should rule the empire for the good of God's people. This exalted idea could not be applied in the late empire period but was to be picked up later in the Middle Ages. Ambrose had shown how it might work out in practice. Gelasius insisted that the Emperor must guard the Church but submit himself to the guidance of the pope, who himself was guided by God and St. Peter. It followed that the clergy should not be judged in secular courts and that the pope himself could not be judged by any man. He said: "nobody at any time and for whatever human pretext may haughtily set himself above the office of pope who by Christ's order was set above all and everyone, and whom the universal church has always recognised as its head. However, for more than 50 years after Gelasius, the real position of popes was very much less than their exalted claims. They were used, and sometime abused by Gothic kings and Eastern emperors, and the papacy remained more or less subservient to Constantinople for as long as the early 8th century and papal elections had to be confirmed either by Constantinople or the imperial court in Ravenna.

There were some exceptions to this, notably in the person of Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the 6th century. A prefect of the city of Rome, he gave up his estate to become a monk and became pope in 590 when Rome's situation was desperate. He negotiated with the Lombard invaders, provided food for the starving people of the city and strengthened its defences, concluding a peace without the emperor's authorisation. No pope before

Gregory had dared half as much. He also administered the estates of the church, introduced monasticism to the papacy, and cared for the spiritual needs of his flock, strengthening the churches in Gaul and Spain and of course, sending St. Augustine (of Canterbury, as he was later to be called) as the missionary to England in 597. Gregory's period as pope, by its extension of the pope's authority, marks the transition from the ancient world of imperial Rome to mediaeval Christendom united by the Roman Catholic church. The church, the principal surviving institution from the ancient world, transmitted Roman culture to the Middle Ages. In many ways, the Roman church had taken on the shape of the Roman world in which it had grown to maturity. The most obvious example of this is the way in which the church's organisation followed the pattern of the imperial administration. Each city was entitled to a bishop and each province to an archbishop. Within the bishop's diocese, the hierarchy of officers was virtually the same as that of the Roman civil administration and Church canon law was modelled on Roman law.

During these centuries of aggrandisement at the top of the Church, the grass roots was evolving its own identity, particularly with the emergence of development of monasticism in the East and West. Beginning with St. Antony in the desert in the 4th century, it involved living an ascetical life in prayer and community. The monks aimed to live the Christian life to the full and felt that continued residence in the 'world' hindered this. Those who retreated to 'the desert' inevitably abandoned family life and celibacy was the rule. Beginning in the East, monasticism in the West had the backing of church leaders such as Ambrose and Augustine from the very start. St. Basil set up his own community in Cappadocia with the help of St. Gregory of Nazanzus in the later 4th century, before being ordained the bishop of Caesarea. He believed that the bishop should have ultimate authority over a monastery, and was responsible for opening the doors of monasteries to the suffering and the needy. At the same time, St. Martin of Tours took up the hermit's life with many others before being ordained bishop, and in the 5th century it is thought that monasticism was introduced to the Celtic nations by St. Patrick. (*See Appendix 10*) Wandering monks became the order of the day in Ireland shortly afterwards. But it was St. Benedict of Nursia who would be most responsible for the growth and flourishing of monasticism in the west. He lived in the early 6th century in northern Italy and founded several small monasteries before moving to Monte Cassino, where he devised his 'Rule', based on prayer and work, which has been the basis for monastic communities of men and women all over the world ever since. Monasticism flourished particularly in Ireland, which had been Christianised through the mission of St. Patrick, and it was in the monasteries of Ireland some two centuries later that the practice of making an individual 'confession' in repentance for sins had its origin.

The Church was growing in importance, it was conflicting in its Eastern and Western rules and practices, and confronting the secular power of the State on a regular basis. This was to be the pattern of events for the next thousand years.

Session 5 Church and State

The period of history which followed can be characterised by one word: power. The desire for power and authority, to control others, dictate how they live and what their allegiances should be has been a cause of shame to a Church that came into being as a group of people following the Lord who came 'to serve rather than be served'. The main source of conflict was twofold: between the church of the East and the West and between religious and civil authority - church and state - and from a church point of view, it is clear that its proponents in these ages (and even it may be argued to some extent today!) are living lives that have little to do with the 'gospel' of our founder. The constitution of the Church as a clerical hierarchical organisation based on monarchical principles completely inverts the original ordering of the Church as described in the New Testament, whereas as we have seen, the word 'church' stands for the entire 'community of faith. Here the gospel is propagated not by aloof hierarchs or even learned theologians but by simple humble witnesses to the person and message of Christ more by their deeds than by their words. Nowhere is this ore obvious than in the person of our present pope.

The seeds were being sown already as we have seen, with Gregory the Great separating himself from the Eastern Church by criticizing the Patriarch of Constantinople for using that title, and trying to court the pagan Germanic kingdoms in the West, to convert them to Christianity if possible. Meanwhile, another development with far-reaching consequences for the history of Christianity and the mediaeval modern world was taking place. At the very time that Gregory was turning away from the Eastern Mediterranean and seeking to extend papal influence throughout the West, there began in Arabia the career of the remarkable religious leader, Muhammad of Mecca (570-632). His teaching had an almost immediate impact and the movement of Islam was born, spreading with dramatic speed outside Arabia, after the prophet's death, becoming mediaeval Christianity's greatest opponent, and, by the 10th century, the most prosperous community of the early Middle Ages. Mediaeval Christian authors portrayed Muhammad as an impostor and Islam as a religion of violence and idolatry. On Christmas Day 800, Pope Leo III, high-handedly crowned Charlemagne, the king of the Franks, as the 'peace-bringing' great emperor of the Roman empire, but Charlemagne did not relish the idea of owing his crown to the pope, so in the last fourteen years of his reign he made the papacy subordinate in his empire.

In the 10th century, church history is often referred to as the 'dark ages'. Over dozens of gory pages histories of the papacy describe the innumerable intrigues and conflicts, murders, acts of violence committed by popes and the papal 'court' during this period. This certainly is no church any of us today would want to belong to! Feudal nobles selected candidates for church posts and sought to control church affairs Popes alternated with anti-popes stemming from the rival families of the Roman aristocracy. They had

mistresses and children, who often succeeded them as popes. The only people seemingly able to extricate the Church from this mire were the increasingly powerful rulers of the Eastern Frankish Empire who now styled themselves 'Holy Roman Emperors'. The precedent of the Frankish king, Otto, deposing the pope in 963 for refusing to take an oath of allegiance to his imperial authority, and the engineering of a layman to be elected as his successor, was followed by years of appointment of popes either by the Roman populace or the emperor himself. The urgently needed reform of the papacy began only at the end of the first millennium, led for the most part by members of the monastic reform movement begun at the Abbey of Cluny, in Burgundy at the beginning of the 10th century. This movement was marked not only by strict observance of the Benedictine rule but also by its centralised organisation, which transformed the hitherto loosely organised Benedictine family into the first religious order in the modern sense. Many new monastic orders sprang up as a consequence to emphasise the spirit of prophecy rather than the spirit of power, most notably the Cistercians, founded at Citeaux in 1097, self-supporting communities of men dedicated to regular work and prayer and living in silence. Their most notable personality became Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) who became the first of the great mediaeval mystics and the leader of a new spirit of ascetic simplicity and personal devotion, while also influencing the crusades against Islam in 1147. One of the people influenced by the Cluniac order was Hildebrand, later Pope Gregory VII, for whom the 'church' meant in effect the whole of society, viewed as Christian people which was to be governed by the clergy, who were to elect the pope rather than have him appointed by the emperor. Under Gregory VII, the conflict with secular forces came to open warfare, and he declared papal power to be absolute in 1075. All secular powers owed him submission and he could depose kings and emperors.

The part of German kings and emperors in this process cannot be underestimated either. King Henry III deposed three rival popes in 1046, and eventually nominated Pope Clement II, who only ruled for a year until his death in 1059. A series of German popes loyal to the emperor and open to reform followed, but unwittingly it was this series of good popes who would go on to create the basis for the papacy as the greatest rival to the Holy Roman Empire. The papacy has only been kept alive by repeated reforms. The decadence of the 9th century was followed by the Gregorian reforms of the 11th century, much as the decadence of the papacy during the Renaissance in the 15th century was followed by the Reformation in the 16th century, which unfortunately split the Church because Rome refused to carry out the reforms that were really needed. Thus the Reformation was followed by a Counter-Reformation, which, despite its impressive achievements in politics, Baroque art and the reform of pastoral care, only confirmed and cemented the Mediaeval status quo with regard to the papacy, the liturgy, theology and church discipline. In five hectic years (1049-54) Pope Leo IX undertook a widespread programme of reform, creating 'cardinals' (literally 'hinges') a kind of official papal senate, and appointing many people from outside Rome to this office. Claims were

nevertheless made by his confidants that the papacy was the source and standard for all laws, the highest instance with the right to sit in judgment on all others, but itself subject to no one's judgment. The reforms of Pope Gregory VII amounted to a sort of 'revolution from above', giving birth to an absolutist papal monarchy of the following centuries, which had nothing to do with the church of the New Testament. The Roman Church became 'Roman' through and through and demanded recognition as the mother and head of all the churches as the one and only church to whom obedience and submission was due. These claims, the political differences within church organisation, the menacing growth of papal power and the gradual alienation between the church of the East and the West, were eventually to cause a 'schism' or rift between East and West that persists to this day.

On July 16 1054, the papal legate to Constantinople interrupted a liturgical celebration in the cathedral to deposit a papal bull on the altar which excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, who in turn promptly excommunicated the papal legates. There followed an outright separation of the Church of the East and the Church of the West, which became a full-blown schism in the next century between these two 'halves' of the Church – a Latin Church autocratically ruled by a papal monarch and an Eastern Greek Church retaining the traditional church order of synodal rule by bishops under the patriarchs and answerable to the Byzantine emperor - which has lasted for 900 years.

The conflict between church and state had its own examples in Britain towards the end of the 12th century. King Henry II had appointed his layman friend, Thomas Becket, as archbishop of Canterbury. While championing the rights of the clergy to be governed by the Church, Becket also had a great love for the poor and his previous somewhat hedonistic friendship with the king was soon forgotten when Henry tried to force him to allow state control over church matters. After an exile in France, Becket returned to Canterbury at Christmas 1170 where he immediately excommunicated several bishops who had supported the king, whose famous remark, 'will no one rid me of this turbulent priest' was interpreted by several knights as the king's desire to do away with him and promptly went to the cathedral to murder him. Becket was quickly canonised and a cult grew around him. The king went to Canterbury to do public penance.

Sadly the characteristic features of the Gregorian reforms of the 11th century became the roots of malignant growth that eventually led to the Reformation, and to the amputation once again, of a substantial portion of the Church. This problem can be clearly seen at the turn of the 13th century during the pontificate of Innocent III (1198-1216), with whom the papacy attained the peak of its authority and influence. He was a brilliant diplomat and theologian, eloquent orator but also a born ruler with an instinct for power. He indisputably represents the apex of the Mediaeval papacy but also its turning point. Under him the 'Romanization' of the Church reached its summit, fixated on an absolutist monarch who reigns supreme over the Church as its sole ruler. For Innocent, St. Peter

(the pope) was the father and the Roman Church was the mother of all Christendom. This new 'imperial' Roman Catholic Church produced its own canon law and jurisprudence, and an ideology in which the emperor and all other secular rulers were subordinate to the pope. In this legal system an army of legal scholars came into being who enabled the papal monarchy to extend and enforce its control over the everyday life of all the churches throughout Europe. The pope was at the same time the supreme ruler, the absolute legislator and the final judge, who at will could overthrow the decisions of any and every other authority. Within this scenario, the imposition of clerical celibacy established a new social order in which the clergy and the hierarchy now became a class apart and elevated above the people or laity, who were now completely excluded from any kind of authority or responsibility. Hence the 'Church' came to mean the clergy, organised hierarchically and monarchically as a pyramid with the pope at its apex. Similar forms of hierarchical 'organisation' developed in the monasteries and the city cathedrals, at the instigation of Innocent III. At the same time a number of 'mendicant' (literally, 'begging') orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans came into being, who lived together in prayer and poverty but instead of being confined to a particular monastery as was the requirement under the Benedictine rule, went out into the streets, preaching the gospel in cities and universities, establishing theology as an academic discipline and engaging in learned dialogue with Jewish and Islamic scholars. Innocent III quickly recognised the potential of these mendicant orders and gave them his approval, which removed them from the influence of bishops or secular clergy, and forced them to look directly to the pope for direction. The Dominican's academic proclivities contrasted with the Franciscans' anti-intellectualism, serving lepers and the sick but both became significant forces. The Dominicans later were to give the church great theologians like Albert and Thomas Aquinas, and later still the Franciscans were to contribute their own theological masters in Bonaventure and William of Ockham. Aquinas who became *the* great philosophical theologian of the Catholic Church was regarded in his own day as a dangerous innovator. While responsible for what could be argued as the largest book ever published, the 'Summa Theologiae' (a summary of doctrine and thought on such topics as the existence of God, faith and reason, the person of Jesus Christ, and the life of the sacraments) he was also the author of some of the great 'hymns' of our tradition, eg. 'Tantum Ergo' and 'Adoro Te Devote', which put into words and music what we believe. His thinking was to form the basis for all Catholic theology in the years to come.

Innocent III also had significant victories over the kings of England and France in the wielding of papal power against the state. His desire to eradicate 'heresies', which he regarded as acts of treason, led to the establishment of what came to be called the 'Inquisition', a special court to deal with dissenters who were then handed over to the civil authorities for punishment or execution. The Dominicans became its favoured papal agents and tales of torture and brutality abound from this period. The Inquisition

eventually morphed into what came to be known as the Holy Office, a punitive wing of the Church's authoritarianism and, while lacking physical brutality, was responsible for the excommunication or disciplining of theologians and dissidents ever since and its present incarnation is known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), the previous head of which was one Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger!

The notion of the use of military force to achieve spiritual aims also developed in the early mediaeval period, but also became a means of forcefully spreading Christianity and suppressing internal dissidence. Initially these 'crusades' were launched against the people of Islam in an attempt to assert power over the shrines of the Holy Land but Pope Innocent III actually initiated them against fellow Christians, at first in Constantinople in 1204, aiming to subjugate the Greek church under a Latin patriarch and in 1209 against the 'Cathars' of France. These wars in the name of Christ represent a monstrous abuse of the symbol of the cross and profound perversion of Christianity. They have also given rise to a word in the English language that is now frequently used of people with an irrational, dogmatic way of thinking who wish to force their way of life on others. Into this scenario came St. Francis of Assisi, the rich young man who had renounced his titles and wealth to live in poverty the life of the gospel, and gathered people around him to do so. This represented an alternative way of discipleship to that of crusading domination and control, institutionalisation and indoctrination. Regrettably, the popes failed to follow the example of St. Francis and their self-inflation was followed by their humiliation.

While all this was going on, there emerged a 'popular religion' in the Middle Ages, in the honouring of the Virgin Mary, the saints and festivals, often taking over what had been pagan festivals, and bringing them into the Christian tradition, the trafficking of 'holy relics' and the passion for pilgrimages to Rome, Canterbury and Compostela. The growth of a more 'personal' piety took place among the people of the Church, while its hierarchs seemed to be contenting themselves with far more secular matters, which eventually served to alienate them from their people. Society was changing and the Church was not changing with it.

By the end of the 13th century, fortunes were to be reversed dramatically. Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) instigated 'indulgences' as a means of gaining revenue by 'purchasing' time off 'purgatory', taxed both the clergy and laity and provoked quarrels with the kings of England and France, defining obedience to the pope as 'absolutely necessary for salvation for every human creature'. The practice of 'simony', buying church positions and offices also became common during this period. Boniface planned to excommunicate King Philip IV of France but was arrested and imprisoned by the king's agents, dying a month later. His successor, the archbishop of Bordeaux, was enthroned in Lyon, not Rome and moved the papal court to Avignon, under the protection of the French king. The 'Avignon papacy' was to last 70 years, and represented a period of lost authority and respect but increased aggrandizement and pursuit of wealth through

taxation to enable the popes to live in a splendid opulence that was completely contrary to the spirit of the gospel. Moral and religious leadership was thus well and truly lost. The papal court became more bureaucratic and a more centralised, effective but more complicated papacy developed, and a more expensive one. The spiritual role of the papacy seemed to be forgotten in the mad rush to collect income in exchange for some privilege or favour. Once the papacy had returned to Rome things did not improve. At the end of the 13th century two competing lines of popes emerged, mutually excommunicating each other and the Council of Constance in 1414-18 tried to redress the balance, by proclaiming that 'the Council stands above the pope' because, as a legitimately convoked gathering of representatives of the universal Church, therefore, including the pope, was obliged to obey the Council in matters pertaining to faith, the eradication of schism and the general reform of the Church. However, undeterred by the decrees of the Council successive popes renewed the Mediaeval claims to supremacy, which was to result later in the abuse of the papal office by the popes of the Renaissance period, and an adamant refusal to reform the papal system. Living like Renaissance princes lives of immense luxury, unrestrained hedonism and uninhibited profligacy promoting the interests of their families, these popes were to bring disgrace to their office and to the inheritance they claimed to have received from the fisherman of Galilee. The battle between the Borgias and the de Medicis is well known and bribery and favouritism were rife in the papal courts for many years. So preoccupied were they with their own gratification, they failed to notice a hitherto unknown Augustinian professor of theology at Wittenburg, one Martin Luther, who in 1517 published 95 critical theses criticising the sale of indulgences to finance the construction of the new basilica of St. Peter's. For centuries Rome had blocked all serious reform; the payback for this was the Reformation, which once afoot, quickly developed an enormous religious, political and social dynamic. For Rome had already lost the church in the East, this was a second catastrophe which cost it most of its northern influence.

The great religious revolution called the Reformation broke out in 1517 but it is necessary to go back at least a hundred years to understand what caused it. The roots of abuse were very old and deep. Negligence, ignorance, and sexual immorality were widespread among the clergy and taken for granted by lay people, but it was the official sanction of this corruption by the papacy that caused the trouble. No doubt there was much hidden devotion and saintliness in all ranks of society in the 15th century and pockets of piety even in Rome. There were probably many parish priests like Chaucer's 'poor parson of a town' who lived useful lives of dedicated godliness; but they did not make history.

Session 6 Reformation and beyond

It is difficult to form an objective picture of the corruption of the clergy in the century before the Reformation. By most accounts, negligence, ignorance, absenteeism and sexual immorality were widespread among the clergy and taken for granted by lay people. Later mud-slinging was not always as accurate as pretended, for exaggeration is all too easy in depicting human sin, folly and weakness. But corruption is one thing, official sanction of corruption is quite another. The heart of the rotten condition of the Catholic church lay in papal protection and promotion of abuses. The Reformation began on 31 October 1517 when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses simply as a proposal of an earnest university professor to discuss the theology of indulgences in the light of the errors and abuses that had grown up over the centuries, which he claimed, encouraged people in their sin and tended to turn their minds away from Christ and God's forgiveness. The pope claimed authority to 'shut the gates of hell and open the door to paradise', and an obscure monk challenged that authority. His contemporaries knew at once that Luther had touched the exposed nerve of both the hierarchy of the church and the everyday practice of Christianity. Christian Europe was never the same again. Three main traditions were to emerge from this: Lutheran (in Germany and Scandinavia); Zwinglian and Calvinist (in Switzerland, France, Holland and Scotland) and the Church of England. The Reformation was primarily a rediscovery of the gospel of God's saving work in Christ. This truth liberated the mind and heart from any theology which obscured it, and any practice or custom which corrupted it.

Luther's personal impetus to reform the Church and the immense explosive impact this reform would develop came from the single basic conviction that the Church must return to the gospel of Jesus Christ and his primacy alone. Luther re-asserted the primacy of 'grace and faith': by grace alone (ie. in virtue of the favour of the merciful God as he has shown himself in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ) and by faith alone (ie. the unconditional hopeful trust in God's loving promises). In his thinking, grace and faith were superior to pious actions and meritorious works in the achievement of salvation.

Luther's personal experience of justification through faith, which implies placing one's trust in God, not in human works or institutions apart from God, formed the basis of his public call for the reform of the Catholic Church. Instead of responding to the reformers' demand that the Church 'return to the Gospel of Jesus Christ,' a reform that would have meant fundamental changes in the system, Rome refused and reacted by demanding Luther's unconditional submission. And when this submission was refused, Rome replied in January 1521 with the sentence of excommunication. By then, however, it was too late. Luther's message had spread throughout Germany and attracted a large following, including powerful princes ready to protect him and to carry out the needed reforms in their own areas, even against Roman and Imperial opposition. Hence we have a new

‘schism’ between northern Europe, which became largely Protestant, and southern Europe which became aggressively Roman Catholic. The reformers rejected the authority of the pope, the merit of good works, indulgences, the mediation of the Virgin Mary and the saints, and all the sacraments which had not been instituted by Christ. They rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation (see below), the view of the Mass as a sacrifice, purgatory and prayers for the dead, private confession of sin to a priest, celibacy of the clergy and the use of Latin in the services. They also rejected all the paraphernalia that expressed these ideas. The Pope of the time, Leo X, was too busy with the daily routine of managing the huge papal bureaucracy and the demands of his own family to give any significant moral leadership to Christian Europe at this critical time.

When Luther’s ideas and writings were smuggled into England, the anti-clerical and anti-papal movement which had already been in place for two centuries came to the fore. But for the English the Reformation represented more politics than religion when Henry VIII proclaimed himself head of the Church of England in 1534, as a result of the pope’s refusal to sanction his divorce of Queen Catherine. Henry did destroy the power of the pope and end monasticism but a powerful religious movement towards reform among his people was going on at the same time. Martyrs such as St. Thomas More (“I die the king’s good servant but God’s first”), St. John Fisher and many more to follow in what later became known as poenal times, enhanced the value of a ‘servant Church’ but not necessarily the power of the pope.

Despite his rather questionable private life, Pope Paul III was the most sincere reformer to mount the papal throne in the 16th century and he did manage to call the Council of Trent in 1537, where the fathers made little or no effort to understand the biblical and historical theology of the Protestants; instead they contented themselves with re-affirming scholastic theology and anathematising Protestant positions as heresy, demanding from them complete submission. The programme of the Council was of Counter-Reformation and nowhere is this more clear than in the reform of the Mass, dismissing the demands of the Protestants for the liturgy to be celebrated in the vernacular and the laity to be admitted to Communion from the chalice. It re-affirmed the mediaeval notion of the Eucharist as an act performed by the ordained celebrant and concentrated on the moment of turning the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ (‘transubstantiation’) and re-enacting the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. As in the Middle Ages, the laity were mere spectators and their presence could be dispensed with if desirable. Their reception of Communion, except once a year was discouraged, since they were presumed to be unworthy without a previous confession and absolution of their sins. Furthermore, everything was loaded with Baroque ceremony and decoration in the Roman style. The liturgical celebration, especially the Pontifical Mass, became a grand religious spectacle for an audience of awed spectators, a theatrical performance acted out in a theatre created by magnificent Baroque architecture, on an elaborate stage dominated by a Baroque high

altar and orchestrated with intricate Baroque music. All this pageantry expressed the renewed papal claim to power and authority. Guided by narrow ecclesiastical interests the Council initiated a programme of re-Catholicization of Europe to be achieved by political means where possible and by military force where necessary. The refurbished Roman Inquisition enforced internal discipline and in the second half of the sixteenth century internal repressions, diplomatic complications and military aggressions produced a deluge of religious conflicts and religious wars, which ravaged Germany and France in particular, and Protestant groups in Spain and Italy were ruthlessly suppressed; there were numberless atrocities on both sides.

There followed a period of religious warfare and dispute that went on for nearly a century, the only highlight of which period was the foundation of the Jesuits by St. Ignatius Loyola in 1534, which was approved by the pope in 1540. Their disciplined way of life and fervent missionary activity brought the message of Jesus all over the world in the coming years, and their expansion over this period was fuelled as a response to the Protestant Reformation. It was largely through their work that the Church expanded into Asia during the 18th century and eventually into what became known as North America. Similarly there arose what came to be known as the 'mystic' tradition in Spain with St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. While this left us a rich spiritual heritage, its emphasis on personal religion and a direct relationship to God made much of the Church very nervous.

Exhausted by decades of warfare, culminating in the Thirty Years War of 1618-48, the Catholic and Protestant rulers finally resolved their differences in the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which granted parity to the Lutheran and Catholic Churches and officially recognised the Calvinist reformed church. The religious rights guaranteed by this accord have largely persisted up to the present day, but the differences have discredited Christianity in general. This period was followed by the age of religious dissension and strong decline in religious fervour, and France became the dominant power in Europe until the French Revolution of 1789, when power changed hands and was now seated in the hands of the people rather than the sovereign. This was the beginning of what would come to be called the 'laicite', the secular character of state and society, which was to be formulated in France at the beginning of the 20th century and continues today. In England the emergence of the Wesley brothers in the middle of the 18th century ushered in a new group of believers, who came to be called 'Methodists', whose aim was to provide a disciplined method of spiritual improvement without many of the trappings of an institutional church. Their emphasis on personal piety was instanced in the many beautiful hymns the brothers wrote which are still in regular use today.

A new 'enemy' was soon to come into view for the Church with all its 'imperial' posturing – the development of knowledge and science in the period called the

Enlightenment. Hostility to progress and outright opposition to this 'modernism' was to characterise the Church's policies and actions for many years to come and, it might be argued, even up to the present day. Science became the pre-eminent superpower of the dawning new era. Galileo, Descartes and Pascal helped lay the foundations for a new appreciation of the superiority of reason. They relied on ongoing logical deduction and empirical observation rather than venerable authorities, and the Church, fearing a threat to its monopolistic power to control truth, reacted negatively, mainly through the exercise of the Inquisition. In England, the 'rationalists' were represented by three major figures, Locke, Berkeley and Hume who formed the 'empiricist' school of thought. Galileo's suffering was to last over a 20 year period at the beginning of the seventeenth century and he was repeatedly condemned as 'heretical', before spending the last years of his life under house arrest. He was not 'rehabilitated' until 1979, 350 years after his death. In mediaeval thinking, the pope represented the highest authority, in the Reformation this was the Bible but now the highest authority became human reason, making use of the tools of science. When Charles Darwin made his appearance in the 19th century with his work on the origin of the human species a similar fate of rebuttal and opposition met him from the Church.

In the 19th century, the dominant world power ceased to be France and became Great Britain, and was linked to its industrial revolution and technological developments. Furthermore, the end of the penal times was marked by Catholic emancipation in 1829 and the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850, aided greatly by learned and pious clerical figures such as John Henry Newman, the founder of the Oxford Movement and most significant 'convert' from the Church of England to Catholicism. In a gesture of great courtesy and generosity a Catholic priest, Fr. Thomas Norton O.P. was buried with great honour in a Church of England churchyard in Leicestershire in 1800, while the penal era was still technically in place.

After the Napoleonic Wars the political map of Europe was redrawn at the Congress of Vienna in 1814. This congress brought about the restoration of the papal states which Napoleon had abolished (but which later, with the exception of Rome, were to become part of the new kingdom of Italy in 1861) and ushered in a period of revival in art, architecture, theology and music, but democracy continued its triumphant advance propelled forward by science and technology, and proved a great shock to the Christian churches, which reacted accordingly. The Roman Catechism, published by the Council of Trent in 1566 became the basis for Catholic religious education rather than the Bible, and movements of piety and triumphalism such as 'ultramontanism' (an extreme Rome-friendly group) came about as a means of keeping the flock on the true path of the Catholic faith. The high-point of this period from a Church point of view was the proclamation of the doctrine of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council of 1870 as a counterpoint to the spread of democracy and of outright opposition to the modern

world. Under the leadership of Pius IX and his successors every effort was made to strengthen the anti-modern, mediaeval, Counter Reformation Catholic fortress to dispel the chill winds of intellectualism, religious indifference and militant atheism. Vatican I had established the papacy as the primary authority within the Roman Catholic Church but this could not mend the damage done by the development of modern thought. By the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century the Catholic believer was enclosed within a closed environment with its own worldview, which distanced itself from the modern world while continuing to justify its claim to a monopoly on the ultimate interpretation of the world and morality. Conflicts about the future course of the Catholic Church escalated after the First Vatican Council which had been abruptly suspended because of the Franco-Prussian war and was never reconvened. Increasingly it would become clear that a new Council would be needed to tackle the problems left unresolved or left more complicated by its predecessor. But it would take almost 90 years until a pope, John XXIII, facing up to a completely changed global situation would recognise that need and convene the Second Vatican Council.

The brief papacy of Leo XIII was noted for its emphasis on social teaching - reform of existing unjust practices and trade unionism to ensure proper income for workers – as outlined in his encyclical “Rerum Novarum” of 1891. Pius X who followed him returned the Church to conservative efforts in the light of the French anti-clerical legislation. Only slowly in Victorian England did Catholic-Protestant antipathy decrease, as much anti-Catholicism had thrived on the threat to employment from Irish immigrants. England also provided a haven for Karl Marx (1818-83) whose thinking was to supply the background to the communist system of government which later would have disastrous effects on Church and state particularly in Eastern Europe and China. At about the same time this thinking was taken further by Friedrich Nietzsche, who claimed quite simply that ‘God is dead’ and that therefore humanity must ‘go it alone.’ and also in the development of the 20th century thought through Marxism and Fascism, as instanced by Lenin and Stalin, and Hitler and Mussolini. The Church did not cover itself in glory by openly opposing these modes of thought. The Lateran treaty of 1929 with Mussolini gave the Vatican recognition as an independent state with the pope as its ruler at the expense of giving up its territorial claims in Italy and agreement to keep out of politics. Pope Pius XI soon changed his attitude when he realised that this had been a cynical attempt by Mussolini to establish the credibility of his fascist movement. Totalitarianism reached its peak under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, who attempted to form a Nazi super-race and community, purified from ‘rogue elements’ such as Jews and Slovaks. Catholic bishops endorsed his new regime because of their fear of communism and Hitler guaranteed Catholics freedom to profess and practise their religion in an independent Church by means of a concordat which was violated by the Nazis almost from the very beginning. Pius XI drafted the German language encyclical “Mit Brennender Sorge” (‘with deep anxiety’) in 1937, after the Nazis had destroyed the network of Catholic

organisations in Germany, clamped down on the Catholic press and schools and severely restricted the work and ministry of its churchmen. The Pope called on all Catholics to resist the idolatrous cult of race and state and to stand against the perversion of Christian doctrines and morality, maintaining their loyalty to Christ and to Rome. Hitler's first reaction was fury and then a silence that spoke for itself. In the very same year Pius XI issued another encyclical, "Divini Redemptoris", condemning the errors of communism.

The new Pope Pius XI, a former diplomat, while trying to steer an almost impossible political path was roundly criticised in that he did not do enough to save thousands of Jewish people from the gas chambers. The debate surrounding his involvement or lack of it in this process carries on still. In the post-war period there was a revival of religion as a token of gratitude for survival and this was accompanied by much immigration into England, France and Italy in particular by many people who had been displaced from their own countries and could not return. This brought with it a 'flowering of faith' and piety in Europe that was to continue into the late 1970's. The place of Pope John XXIII was a key factor in the Church regaining some of the respect it had lost during the war years and what he achieved as an old man in five short years turned out to be quite remarkable. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the Patriarch of Venice was elected in 1958 to be something of a 'stop-gap' because the favoured candidate, Giovanni Montini (later Paul VI) was thought to be too young. The cardinals and the Curia presumed that he would merely keep the seat warm for a few years and do nothing outrageous. How wrong did they turn out to be! John was a learned man with a peasant background, very pious but not without a sense of humour. When asked once if he knew 'how many people worked in the Vatican', he replied, 'Yes, about half!' John felt that the Church needed a new direction after years of bureaucracy and Curial control. In 'opening the doors of the Church', he proclaimed that he wanted to let the Spirit in, and also 'to let the small out'. He wrote two ground-breaking encyclical letters, 'Mater et Magistra' and 'Pacem in Terris', and of course, convened the Vatican Council. He wanted to bring in the minds of theologians and scholars as 'periti' or experts, to advise the bishops in their deliberations and decision-making and stifle the influence of the Curia who had previously banned some of these great people – like Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu and Henri de Lubac – from preaching and teaching. One of the most esteemed thinkers about this time who was also asked to become a peritus was a young theologian priest called Joseph Ratzinger, who of course, in another life years later, would become Benedict XVI. We have dealt with the Second Vatican Council in Section 1 of the course and will return to it later in Section 3, but sadly, John XXIII died in June 1963, while the Council was in its infancy and it was left to his successor, Paul VI, to oversee its debates and countersign its documents which were supposed to give the Church as sense of direction for the later 20th century, but most of which were quietly ignored by the very powers they were published to eliminate.

Session 7 Power and Piety – the lesson of history

In this session, we will make considerable reference to a recent book by Fr. Hans Kung, “Can we save the Church? We can save the Church!” Kung has been one of the greatest critics of the 20th century Church, a man who was chosen to be a ‘peritus’ or advisor to the Vatican Council along with Fr. Joseph Ratzinger. He has been prohibited from teaching on many occasions, a punishment he likens to that of the mediaeval Inquisition, without the physical torture, but he has remained loyal to his Church. In his introduction to his new and, he claims, last, book he says: *‘I have decided to pen this compact summary to set forth and justify my carefully considered view of the crux of this crisis: namely that the Catholic Church –this great community of faith –is seriously ill, suffering under the Roman system of rule, a system which developed during the second half of the second millennium and which, despite opposition, remains in place today....this Roman system of rule is characterised by a monopoly on power and truth, by legalism and clericalism, by hostility to sexuality, by misogyny and by clerical use of pressure on the laity...’*.p.5

The papacy of John Paul 11 and Benedict XVI

We have already spoken about Pope Paul VI, the successor of John XXIII, a holy and good man, whose papacy was entirely overshadowed by the publication of ‘*Humanae Vitae*’, the encyclical letter which declared that all acts of artificial contraception are ‘intrinsicly evil’, and the devastating effect it had on the Church and its place in modern society (See Session 6 of Section 1). The brief pontificate of John Paul I promised so much by was tragically ended after only a month. There are many things about our present pope, Francis, which remind us of John Paul I, not least his smile and engaging, relaxed manner. No one could possibly deny the impact that John Paul I had on them. For one thing many more people saw him in the flesh than any previous pope, because of his many pilgrimages to all parts of the world. He changed the ‘image’ of the papacy from a rather secret enclosed ministry to one that was visual and accessible for everyone. His ‘openness’ in this matter resulted in much global popularity and admiration, but also in huge expense, misunderstanding and of course an attempt on his life in 1981. There is no doubt that some of his ‘gestures’ were of great significance – in his native Poland, in Israel and even in Great Britain – the most notable of which was his propensity to kiss the ground on every occasion when he landed in a new country. He is often credited with being the main or one of the main reasons for the fall of the Soviet empire, and certainly his personality played a large part in the erosion of Soviet power and dominance, beginning in his own native country. His meeting with the Archbishop at Canterbury, and the courtesy afforded to him by the Church of England on that day will never be forgotten, as his compassion instanced at the service of anointing of the sick at Southwark Cathedral and his towering words against warfare at Coventry airport will

long live in the memories of those of us privileged to be present on those occasions. The battle of this strong man with increasing frailty endeared him to so many millions across the globe, so that not only did he preach Christ in his words but imitated Christ in his suffering. He will be 'canonised' soon in a procedure that has taken very little time to accomplish – though not so short as some of the mediaeval saints, lest we forget! – along with John XXIII, but maybe it is not wrong to doubt the wisdom of this venture. There were many things that happened in his papacy that were not so worthy, most of all his turning a blind eye to the abuse by priests of children, (See Session 6 of Section 1) even among the highest of prelates, including the founder of the very conservative Legionaries of Christ, whose behaviour was subsequently discovered to be so awful that Pope Benedict forced him to live a life of prayer and contemplation with no public exercise of his ministry again (which occasioned Fr.Kung to comment: "*they (the episcopate) have, with very few exceptions, shown little interest in uncovering the deep historical and systemic reasons for such horrific aberrations...*" with the result that *'The Catholic Church is in its deepest crisis of confidence since the Reformation and nobody can overlook it.'* p.7) the increase of a largely 'conservative' government, and the outlawing by his officials of some of the great contemporary thinkers, particularly those who espoused what came to be known as 'Liberation theology' in Central and South America.

Pope Benedict was a deep thinking man with great insight whose approach was changed from being a liberal theologian to a conservative bishop as long ago as 1968 during the Parish student riots. As Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith he was, effectively John Paul II's 'enforcer', often even referred to as his 'rotweiller' and as Pope he espoused what he called in technical language a 'hermeneutic of continuity', which means keeping the 'status quo' or even going backwards in theological teaching and pastoral practice. In so doing he made some very obvious 'mistakes' – accepting the Society of Pius X, founded by the traditionalist archbishop Marcel Lefebvre back into full communion with the Church and thereby promoting the use of the Tridentine Mass; creating distrust of the Protestant churches by continuing to insist that they do not constitute 'churches' in the true sense of the word, luring conservative married Anglican clergymen into the Church by waiving their obligation to celibacy and installing conservative officials and reactionary bishops around the world, not auditing the behaviour of the financial officials and the Vatican bank, and making a series of PR 'gaffes' such as his lecture at Regensburg and statements about the use of condoms by male prostitutes – the Church in this time has perfected the art of getting things horribly wrong and being completely out of touch with the real world. His increasing reliance on the Curia, especially in relations with the media has had disastrous effects, and is the reason Fr.Kung claims that the Church is in such a sorry state today: *'To this day the Curia – in its current form a creature of the 11th century – is the chief obstacle to any thorough-going reform of the Catholic Church, to any honest ecumenical reconciliation with the other Christian Churches and world religions, and to any critical, constructive*

coming-to-terms with the modern world. To make things worse, supported by the Curia, under the previous two popes, there has been a fatal return to old absolutist attitudes and practice' p.xiv

There were other 'factors' developing during these two papacies, unconnected to their incumbents that were to bring huge challenges to the Church – the emergence of capitalism and consumerism with their emphasis on the 'subject' as the most important person to be considered, the invention and development of social media, the alienation of the young (Fr.Kung comments: '*The younger generation simply is no longer interested in the Church; it has become meaningless to their lives.*' p.1) the promotion and execution of unjustified warfare, great natural disasters due, in no small part, it is believed, to climate change, and of course the continuing growth of 'secularism' a system of thinking and acting that relegates faith and religious believing to the margins of society and looks eventually towards their complete elimination as means of showing how people can live their lives in the modern era.

The period of Church history from its early beginnings which we have studied, albeit scantily, in this section of our course, has many lessons to teach us, and Fr.Kung's 'take' on it is worth considering:

'We have the apostle Paul to thank for the earliest documents of Christianity. But in modern Rome, he is entirely overshadowed by the other chief apostle, St.Peter. Ironically, while the New Testament recounts very few historical details about St.Peter's personal leadership in the Church, we are very well informed about Paul's leadership thanks to his epistles. St.Paul enjoyed astonishing authority: he is well aware that his religious communities are in many respects immature and often make mistakes. In spite of this, he never behaves towards them in a way that would suggest that they need him, the wise teacher, to lecture them about their freedom, much less to curtail it. On the contrary, he takes their freedom for granted, respects it and struggles, with it, so that his communities are not forced to follow him, but do so freely. Certainly where Christ and his gospel are in danger of being repudiated in favour of foreign doctrine, Paul resorts to the threat of condemnation and expulsion. But he never punishes a whole community, even in the case of serious deviations, in the way he disciplines individuals, eg. by temporary exclusion for their own good. As far as he can, Paul at all times steps back from exercising his apostolic power. Instead of commanding his communities, he exhorts them; instead of issuing prohibitions, he appeals to personal judgment and responsibility...instead of 'you', he uses 'we'; he speaks of forgiveness rather than punishment, and instead of repressing their freedom, he challenges his Christian communities to live in Christian freedom. St.Paul never abuses his power by implementing a system where one person dominates another. On the contrary, in matters of church discipline, he avoids any kind of authoritative decree even when it would have been within his competence. In questions of morality unrelated to the Lord and his Word,

he prefers to give his communities full freedom and does not place a noose around their necks. Even where he feels that a decision is clear-cut he avoids unilateral measures and involves the community in the process of decision-making....St.Paul never presents himself to his communities as their overlord, nor indeed as a priest with hierarchical power. An apostle is not the Lord; Jesus alone is the Lord and it is the Lord who sets the standards for his churches and for St.Paul himself. He refuses to treat his followers as 'children'; instead he addresses them as 'brothers' (and sisters); he is their servant in patience, candour and love. It is because he wants to be a faithful servant of the Lord, not simply out of courtesy or good manners that he refrains from exercising his power....At the centre of Paul's understanding of the Church is Jesus Christ and his gospel, not a pope. All officials in the Church must comply unconditionally with this gospel. This democratic view of St.Paul is reflected generally throughout the New Testament, and it prevailed in the Church throughout the first millennium.'

In considering the mediaeval period, he contrasts the papacy of Innocent III with the figure of Francis of Assisi, whose influence on the modern Church is likely to increase because of the pope who has taken his name and his characteristics as an inspiration:

'As a young man, Francis the son of a wealthy silk merchant of Assisi, had led a high-spirited, worldly life like other well-situated young men of the city; then suddenly at the age of 24, a series of experiences led him to renounce family, wealth and career. In a dramatic gesture before the judgment seat of the Bishop of Assisi, he stripped off his sumptuous clothing and deposited it at his father's feet. It is astonishing to see how Pope Francis, from the moment of his election, clearly chose a new style...no bejewelled golden mitre, no ermine trimmed crimson shoulder-cape, no tailor-made red shoes, no pompous papal throne decorated with the triple crown, the emblem of papal political might. Equally astonishing is the way the new pope consciously refrains from melodramatic gestures and high-blown rhetoric and speaks the language of ordinary people, just as a lay person would do....All this would have pleased Francis of Assisi and it is exactly the opposite of everything that his papal contemporary – Innocent III –the mightiest pope of the Middle Ages, stood for. In reality Francis of Assisi represents the alternative to the Roman System that has dominated the Catholic Church since the beginning of the end of the first millennium. What might have happened had Innocent III and his entourage listened to Francis and rediscovered the demands of the gospel?...The teachings of the gospel represent a mighty challenge to the Roman system –the centralistic, juridicized, politicized and clericalized power structure that has dominated Christ's Church in the West since the 11th century....Many Orthodox and Protestant Christians, Jews and believers of other faiths –to say nothing of many non-believers – have long awaited these reforms which are absolutely imperative if the Roman Catholic Church is to realize its potential to give convincing witness to the gospel, and to voice the urgent demands for peace and justice in today's world. The Church can only give such

witness if it ceases to be turned in on itself, fixed on defending its institutional structures and its traditional manner of speaking...If Pope Francis commits himself to such a radical reform, he will not only find broad support within the Church, but he will also win back many of those who, publicly or privately, have long since abandoned the Church. Such a renewed Roman Catholic Church could once again become the witness to the gospel of Christ that it was meant to be.’ pp.xv-xvii

‘The papacy as it took shape in the Christian Church of the first centuries, ie. as a ministry in succession to St.Peter, was and remains to this day a meaningful institution for many Christians, not just Roman Catholics. But from the 11th century onward, this institution gradually morphed into the monarchical-absolutist papacy that has dominated the history of the Roman Catholic Church ever since. It is this monarchical-absolutist papacy that has been responsible for the three great schisms of the Western Church....In traditional histories of the Catholic Church however, far too little critical attention has been given to the problems generated by how the papacy has developed.....(the Second Vatican) Council tried to reform important elements of the Roman system, but unfortunately the stubborn resistance of the Roman Curia managed by and large to hamper these efforts and to restrict their success. In the decades since the Council, Rome has gradually been turning back the clock on the proposals for reform and renewal, and this has in turn led to a renewed outbreak of an already rampant and alarming disease in the Catholic Church....’ pp.5-6

‘And so, in the Catholic Church of the 19th and 20th centuries a typical Roman Catholic traditionalism or fundamentalism developed, which believed that everything should and could be left as it was –or must be restored to what it once was...This kind of traditionalism survives into our own day....No, traditionalism cannot be the Church’s top priority. Rather than an unreserved commitment to some version of the past, the Church needs freedom, a freedom that also manifests itself in a crucial sifting of the Church’s own history. ‘pp.53-4

‘Catholicism, as it has evolved historically, and particularly modern Catholicism in its current form, cannot be the yardstick by which the Church measures itself. Many within the Vatican and many external ‘supporters of the Vatican ’ want to commit the Catholic Church to a ‘status quo’ which is both comfortable and profitable to them. And so they reject, always with reference to a ‘higher’ (ie. papal) authority any proposals for change they have adopted for the Church and they rule out any serious reforms to the Church’s teaching and practice: if it is not Roman (ie .if it does not toe the Vatican line) it is not Catholic....No one who has the slightest idea of the real history of the Church can either ignore its flaws, ruptures and cracks, deny the many contradictions and inconsistencies in its history, or gloss over and excuse them..’ p.55-56

'Is such a Church at all capable of steering a path into the future that allows it both to preserve the original message of Christianity and express it anew? And this brings us to the crucial point: the challenge to reform is addressed not only to the Catholic Church but to every church that considers itself Christian; the Protestant and Orthodox churches are likewise not sanctuaries immune to similar criticism. The crucial question is always the same: does one's Church faithfully incorporate and reflect the original Christian message, the Gospel, which to all intents and purposes is Jesus Christ himself, to whom each church appeals as its ultimate authority? Or is it merely a church system with a Christian label... Without a concrete and consequent return to the historical Jesus Christ, to his message, his behaviour and his fate... a Christian church – whatever its name – will have neither true Christian identity nor relevance for human beings and society. For Catholics, that means that all the many Roman Catholic institutions, dogmas, doctrines, ceremonies and activities must be measured according to the criterion of whether they are 'Christian' in the strict sense of the word, or at the very least not 'anti-Christian'; in short, whether or not they are in agreement with the Gospel. This is what many people in the Church are hoping for when they say to themselves: our Church must become more Christian again, must once again model itself on the Gospel, on Jesus Christ himself...' pp.57-8

Session 7a “Secrets of the Vatican”

We spent one evening watching a Channel 4 documentary called “Secrets of the Vatican”, which looked at the Church during the papacy of Benedict XVI and dealt with many of the matters mentioned above. What was most shocking, however, was the licentious behaviour of some Roman priests, spending nights quite openly in ‘gay clubs’ with paid escorts. They were filmed doing so and thus there can be no question of exaggeration. When one of them went back to a flat with an undercover journalist filming him in secret, he went into a room with another man and had sex all night, after which he set up an altar in his flat and said Mass. To be told about these things is one matter but to see them for yourself is quite another. The thrust of the documentary was to explain some of the real problems that Pope Francis is now facing and indicate some of the reasons why Benedict felt he had to resign – because matters had got completely out of control. The behaviour through the centuries that we have described in this section of the course, is clearly as morally corrupt as it ever had been in the past, and the challenge to be or become a ‘Servant Church’ today is clearly as demanding and difficult as it ever had been beforehand.

SECTION 3

Session 1 Can there be a 'servant Church'?

The lesson of history is that things have never been perfect. The servant Church has not been – yet! The Church or ‘community of believers’ that Our Lord envisaged has not materialised for the same reason that he could not always rein in his own friends and first followers, who so often made mistakes and also were looking for ‘high’ places in his kingdom –human nature. There has always been pride, the desire to manipulate and control in one way or another; there has always been greed, immorality and inequality. Lest we forget, the Church is for sinners trying to be saints. Our pride and sinful nature will always show itself and always has. The ‘servant Church’ is what we are working towards and so many factors have to be taken into consideration if it is ever to be achieved.

So what does it take to be a ‘servant’? What would make anyone want to ‘serve’ another person? We remind ourselves of the fact that Jesus ‘did not come to be serve but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’ To ‘serve’ does not mean to be ‘subservient’, namely to subjugate yourself to the will and whim of another. The only reason you might want to serve someone else is that impact they have had on you, the respect and love they have engendered in you. Often this springs from a sense of appreciation of what they have done and are doing for you. As St. Augustine once said: ‘he who has loved me, has made me lovable’. We will only be a servant Church when we have discovered once again or maybe even for the very first time, the person of our Saviour precisely as our Saviour and Lord, and found within ourselves a desire to love and honour him. This is not dependent on the teachings of popes and bishops, but comes from the heart and soul of each individual who lives in community with others who are of a similar mind and heart depending on their personal and social circumstances and who are willing to place themselves as the ‘disposal’ of this Lord without fear.

So this is not necessarily a ‘top down’ process. A reforming pope such as Francis will not solve everything but certainly he will be and has been a great help. There is no need for grandiose gestures but small almost imperceptible steps, which he has been taking. Many years ago, Cardinal Richard Cushing, the archbishop of Boston, wrote about the ‘grass roots’ to Christian unity and how it could only come about through the will and work of ordinary people:

“If history and experience has taught us anything about unity and unions among Christians, it should be this: although unions may be legislated in world ecumenical councils and assemblies, true unity must be born and nurtured in the local parishes and communities. Unity can be lasting only when it is a response to the Spirit moving in the people, breathing in the souls of the laity, present in what is called the grass-roots of the

church... This is our work and vocation in our generation: to create an atmosphere, a climate of friendship and brotherhood based upon the teachings and example of Christ our Lord... Our role is to prepare the way, to plant the seed which others will harvest, to prepare the climate for the breath of the Holy Spirit, who is the principle of unity in Christ's Church... We are all creatures of our God and creator; by faith and baptism we are brothers and sisters bound by ties much closer than blood; we all share the common task of bringing to the world, the kingdom of peace and of justice. I have realized so often and so well that whenever I showed myself a brother to another human being, there it was that I showed myself as another Christ to another person. Then it was that I received a brother's response; then it was that I saw Christ in my brother. To me, in the simplest terms, this is ecumenism. It is brothers and sisters meeting and talking with one another and helping each other as Christ wants us to do." (from "Steps to Christian Unity" ed. John A. O'Brien, pp.185-198

Nor should we look for a 'quick fix', 'soundbite' solution as the media would seem to want from us. Measured thinking and reflection based on the experience on the ground from among people, coupled with patience, may be what eventually yields dividends. It is not a time to live in a rather paranoid, 'persecution' mindset of the ghetto mentality, which shuts the Church off from the world it has been commissioned by Jesus to transform.

This need for 'transformation', even 'salvation' has never been more important in a civilisation that depends for its continuance on selfishness and self-seeking. The economies of most countries cannot flourish without 'retail' - buying and selling and aggressive marketing of products to convince shoppers that they are a 'must have' addition to their wardrobe, household or office. So we can't just expect everyone to start giving everything away, no matter how noble an ideal this might be, but the development of ethical economics, the move to stop polluting and ultimately destroying our planet, and the calls for a fair living wage for everyone cannot be ignored. A 'utilitarian' view of the world in which people and children are merely commodities to be used for the benefit of others has no place. We simply cannot go on living in the way that we have, which of course is precisely the message of the gospel of Our Lord in the first place. That is why it will always be 'Good News' for the world, but maybe not always the news that people really want to hear, particularly if this entails changing the way they see things and do things.

While we may feel a little pessimistic given these considerations, there really is no need to be. In fact, many elements of the 'servant Church' are present and have been present from the beginning. Look at Paul's letters and the epistle of the earliest apostle to be martyred St. James – "where does these wars and battles between yourselves first start? Isn't it precisely in the desires fighting inside your own selves? You want something and you haven't got it; so you are prepared to kill. You have an ambition that you cannot

satisfy; so you fight to get your way by force.” (James 4:1-2). These people recognised that the problem was about human nature, its hubris and pride, its selfishness and sin, but also the power of the gospel to remedy that situation should it be the benchmark for every believer’s life. The problem is of course that history and the present day tell us that this is not so. Nevertheless, we look back to Eliot’s great poem written so long ago and yet as fresh and pertinent as it ever could be. We look at the tradition of martyrs and saints who did give their lives for Our Lord as his servants. We also consider what has happened in modern times and gone largely unnoticed because the media did not think it was sensational enough. The document, “The Common Good, issued by the bishops of England and Wales before the general election of 1997 is a blueprint for social action and justice in the great largely ignored Church tradition, beginning with Leo X111’s “Rerum Novarum”, John XX111’s “Pacem in Terris” and Pius XI’s “Quadragesimo Anno”, to say nothing of the ground-breaking document of the Second Vatican Council ‘Gaudium et Spes’, John Paul 11’s homily at Coventry airport and the address of Benedict XVI to the British parliament in 2010, and lately, Pope Francis’ exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”. Some of these popes have been criticised for various reasons, some maybe even justified, but very little attention has ever been given to their social teaching or clarity of vision. In a famous phrase for which he was truly vilified, Pope John Paul 11 said that it was possible to commit ‘rape’ in marriage, which of course is very much a statement of the obvious, and those very same people who roundly condemned him for even suggesting such a thing were, within 10 years, actually trying to prove this in the law courts.

There are all sorts of ‘service’ being provided by the Christian churches, particularly in Great Britain. Two of the six major international aid agencies are Church based – Christian Aid and CAFOD, to say nothing of their counterparts in Ireland and Scotland as well as the international aid umbrella of ‘Caritas International’. These are supported day in day out by millions of believers and many more who are of no particular faith but who trust that through these agencies the money and support they give will actually get to the people for whom it is intended. Many of the projects for homeless people were established by the Christian churches – Shelter, The Passage in London, Conway House in Sheffield, Emmanuel House in Nottingham, the Padley Centre in Derby, and the brilliant St.Wilfrid’s Centre in Sheffield, which now enjoys national and international renown and respect for its professional and courteous treatment of mis-placed people. The effort to give asylum to refugees in the face of political expediency, which caused very many people to be suspicious of those who fled here for their lives and think of them as ‘scroungers’ is entirely church-based. The hospice movement and the development of palliative care which we now take for granted, was initiated by the Church with Dame Cecily Saunders setting up St.Christopher’s Hospice in London to be followed shortly by St.Joseph’s Hospice in Liverpool, St.Luke’s Hospice in Sheffield and St.Mary’s Hospice in Birmingham. These establishments are not named after saints for nothing. The LIFE

movement has made great inroads into the mind-set that the only way to solve ‘unwanted pregnancies’ is by abortion and the Catholic Church alone stands against this thinking that unborn children have no rights whereas their mothers do. The care given to mothers contemplating abortion is beyond compare and this is coupled with the work of the Catholic Adoption agencies, many of whom have now been forced to close down by the last Labour government who, in a fit of pique after failing to close down church schools and thereby assume the control of them entirely to themselves, forced legislation through parliament to make church adoption agencies agree to the placement of children with ‘same-sex’ couples’, about which they had grave doubts. Now the state is realising that it might have made a big mistake as these agencies pioneered the post-adoptive care of children which was previously non-existent, and social service departments find themselves without sufficient skill and experience to continue this vital work. At present, the major initiative on the ‘trafficking’ of human persons for slavery or sexual purposes, has been pioneered by the British Catholic Church in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police and the government representatives, which co-operation bodes very well for the future. Nearly every initiative in regard to people in any kind of need originates from the Church or a church-inspired charity and not, as they seem to love to claim, in the minds and schemes of politicians. Today there are ‘Foodbanks’ springing up all over the country to provide sustenance for destitute families, the Street Pastor organisation to monitor and support people in city centres whose ‘night out’ inevitably involves large quantities of drink and maybe even drugs, initiatives in every town to re-train people out of work when the budgets for statutory agencies have all been cut, support for people with psychiatric problems, ‘singing cafés’ for people with dementia, which is fast becoming one of the real areas of great need, refugee centres in some of the larger towns to teach people English and the ways of our country, as well as helping them to fill out forms and get jobs. This is to say nothing of the work for people with physical learning disabilities whose inclusion into the community, while being a political ‘buzz-word’ a few years ago, masked a desire to save money by closing special schools and day centres giving the particular help and training that was necessary. It was only the church-based organisations like the Leonard Cheshire Foundation, which shamed the country into caring for its war-wounded soldiers on a long-term basis, the L’Arche movement set up in France by Jean Vanier and Faith and Light, which brought people with learning impairments into the public consciousness in 1971, St. Joseph’s Pastoral Centre in London, Liverpool Catholic Social Welfare and SPANNED in the Diocese of Nottingham that have served to do what should clearly have been done by statutory bodies. Furthermore, now there are “Dad’s clubs” for single parents meeting, and after school provision for those who cannot afford the horrendously expensive child-care they need to keep working, in church premises with church support. Aid for international disasters still is supplied by organisations overseen by churches, and the generosity of the British people on these occasions is very great indeed. Successive governments have

been in denial of these problems, particularly in latter years when they have been concentrating their attention on wars that should never have been (Is there any oil in Rwanda and the Sudan as there is in Afghanistan and Iraq? –a perfectly legitimate question asked by church leaders) and also on the banks and what they have done to cause a huge international economic crash, a matter which is still unresolved and the people responsible still claiming bonuses!

So the fact of the matter is that should ‘churches’ cease to exist or be unable to continue all this work, the whole social service of Great Britain would eventually collapse. Mr.Cameron’s idea of ‘The Big Society’, while seeming to be a political initiative, was in fact entirely out of keeping with the modern day self-centred society that he and those in previous governments had helped to create. There will be no volunteers because people do not see why they should volunteer, especially if it is for a ‘service’ to the community that should actually be statutorily funded. The majority of volunteers in any service in our country are people of faith and religious commitment who deem it as their duty to share their time and resources with others because of the faith they have in the gospel of Our Lord, nourished as it is within their own Christian community. The “Servant Church”, therefore is not a pie-in-the-sky idea that can never come to pass, but a reality that already exists, albeit in very small ways, in the minds and lives of very many people all over the world. Fr.Kung comments:

Everywhere I go, I meet deeply committed people in parishes and hospitals, schools and charitable institutions, who in their practical day-to-day involvement in church life are following in the footsteps and in the spirit of the man from Nazareth. They are people who – notwithstanding their personal foibles – do much good for their neighbours and for the community, both within and without the boundaries of the Catholic Church. When I look at these people, it becomes impossible for me to think only of the sexual abuse cases and their cover-up or of the other scandals that have recently come to light. All over the world, I have met clergy working on the frontline, wearing themselves out in the service of others. I see innumerable men and women who offer support to young and old, to poor and sick people, to those who have been given a raw deal in life, to those who suffer under their own failures. This is not an idealistic vision of the Church or a mere Utopian projection, but an empirical fact that is confirmed by many other Catholics and Christians generally, and that explains why they, too, do not wish to leave or do away with the Church. And this is the Church with which I can still identify: the global community of committed believers, a community that extends beyond the narrow boundaries of individual denominations. This community of faith is the true Church. Of course I do not exclude popes, bishops or all manner of prelates from this Church, nor do I exclude the dignitaries of other churches either. But, for me, all of these officeholders, who represent the Church as a concrete visible institution, are of secondary importance,

since, according to the New Testament, they should only be the servants and not the masters. Pp 62-3

In order for this to take place, Kung sets out a programme for reform, which starts with the very office of the papacy itself:

For the time being, we must wait and see if Pope Francis will prove to be a pope in the tradition of Pope John XXIII, who better fitted St. Gregory the Great's description of the papal office as 'Servant of the Servants of God' than the concept behind the customary titles of more recent origin: 'Holy Father' or 'Your Holiness' that set the pope above his episcopal confreres and give him a quasi-divine status. P.63... From the history of the rise of Rome and its bishop to leadership in the Church we can learn to appreciate how a papal ministry of service to the unity of the Church centred in Rome and founded on the traditions of the two chief apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul, could still benefit Christendom in the 21st century, provided that the role played by this centre is exercised in the spirit of the gospel. P.72

As we said at the very beginning of these considerations, it has to be something that originates from the person of Jesus Christ, who 'came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many', from our love for him and our desire to serve him, and through him to be at the service of others, as Fr. Kung continues:

The name of Jesus Christ is like a golden thread in the often torn and besmirched (and therefore constantly cleaned and rewoven) fabric of the Church in the course of its history. So... Can we save the Catholic Church? Yes we can, but only if the Spirit of Jesus Christ moves our whole community of faith anew and endows the leadership of the Church with new credibility, understanding and acceptance. That, in turn, depends on those of us who together constitute this community of believers and who are open to the breath of the Holy Spirit, which moves where and as it wills. P.65

While we admit the problems that have existed and continue to exist with Church government, therefore, and its practitioners, we must be mindful of a beautiful phrase quoted in "The Tablet" by Fr. John F.X. Harriott very many years ago: "we are all party to the follies that we mock; all guilty of the errors we condemn". It is in the heart of each person that "the Servant Church" needs to be born, in their willingness to change their minds and ways of doing things and thinking about things, even at a great cost to us personally. Since the Church is comprised of the 'community of believers' or the 'people of God' as Vatican II clearly states, then it must be those people, all of us, individually and communally who, in seeking the Lord ever more deeply in our prayer, and are then prepared to allow him to lead us and guide us in the ways that he wants, even if they are sometimes not the same ways as we had previously hoped or believed in.

Session 2 Sources

For our consideration of the possibility of a ‘Servant Church’ ever fully coming to be, we shall make use of four contemporary documents / books, although there could of course be many more:

“*Evangelii Gaudium*” (“*The Joy of the Gospel*”) – apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis (2013)

To understand why Pope Francis took the time and trouble to publish this exhaustive ‘exhortation’ we look at the editorial of “The Tablet” for November 30 2013:

“The plan that Pope Francis wants the Church to follow has been emerging piece by piece since his election in March, but now he has set it out in detail. He wants a change of the Church’s culture and character, a change of its priorities, a change of its structures. He wants a Church that is neither sleepwalking nor marching in step, but that goes forth into the world getting the mud of the streets on its shoes, to deliver the message of God’s infinite care for every bit of it....the Pope is joyfully exhorting his flock to rethink almost everything it does in pursuit of its one key aim: evangelization: ‘rather than experts in dire predictions, dour judges bent on rooting out every threat and deviation, we should appear as joyful messengers of challenging proposals, guardians of the goodness and beauty which shine forth in a life of fidelity to the gospel.’ Contrary to those who equate evangelization simply with encouraging church-going, he embraces ‘those members of the faithful who preserve a deep and sincere faith, expressing it in different ways, but seldom taking part in worship.’”

The Church must show compassion to these people and those also who do not obey every last detail of all aspects of its moral teaching, which must mean the majority of them. This is how we evangelise them, the Pope says, and he insists that the evangelizing style he wants to see is about inclusion, not exclusion.

If there is anger in the soul of Pope Francis, he does not reserve it for those whose private lives do not conform to some Catholic ideal, but towards those who exploit the poor and increase their poverty: ‘the thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule.’ Even more than the rich, the poor need the wealth creation that market economies can supply, though global businesses clearly must serve the common good as well as make a profit. ‘This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us...we need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.’ This has far-reaching implications for the way Catholics live their faith and for every layer of Church administration from local parishes to the Vatican itself. The Pope admits that he has not set out to tick every box, and he specifically invites

outside help – even for reforming the papacy – in moving the Church forward. His model of the Church is more participative and open, more decentralized and fluid, more willing to take risks, less bothered about doctrinal conformity, less clerical. But above all, Christ-centred.”

“The Signs of the Times: seven paths of hope for a troubled world” – by Jean Vanier (2014)

Jean Vanier is one of the most influential Christians of the last 60 years. His decision to live in community with two men who had learning difficulties all those years ago, gave rise to what has come to be called the “L’Arche” movement, which has 140 communities all over the world, and “Faith & Light”, originally a pilgrimage of people with intellectual disabilities with their families to Lourdes in 1971, but now, likewise a world-wide movement. He has developed his own ‘theology’ of vulnerability, believing that success and power prevent us from being truly ourselves. It is only when we recognize our weakness, when we seek help, that we become human. “We are not called to be perfect,” he says, “we are called to be humble”, and this is the gift we receive when we live with and work beside people who are fragile or withdrawn into anger and depression.

He begins his book by quoting the closing address of the Second Vatican Council: *“All you who feel heavily the weight of the cross, you who are poor and abandoned, you who weep, you who are persecuted for justice, you who are ignored, you, the unknown victims of suffering, take courage. You are the preferred children of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of hope, happiness and life. You are the brothers of the suffering Christ, and with Him, if you wish, you are saving the world.” .pp.2-3* and then comments himself, *“The church is a body. It needs its weakest members and they should be honoured. Isn’t this the message of Vatican II?” p.3*

“The values extolled by our wealthy modern societies often damage inner freedom and personal conscience. We live in what could be called a tyranny of normality. Of course norms and laws are necessary to provide human beings with a stronger inner structure. But in our times, cultural normalisation based solely on success and power prevents us from becoming truly ourselves, with our strengths and weaknesses, and from developing what is at our heart. Even in the Church isn’t there a tension between the values of society and those of the Gospel?” p.6

“It is through my own church that Jesus has called me to bring good news to the poor and proclaim the liberation of those who are captive and oppressed. I am grateful to the Church for the nourishment of the sacraments, for the word of God, and for the inspiration given by the successor of Peter. I am far too aware of my own poverty, weakness and infidelity to judge anyone else for theirs. Nevertheless, I am disappointed by the loss of vitality and enthusiasm among members of my church which makes it hard

for them to commit themselves to the poor so that they can bring them the good news of Jesus. Too few ecclesiastical authorities affirm that faith in Jesus is intimately bound to this commitment” p.8.

He has developed a great affinity with Pope Francis whom, he claims, has created a ‘revolution of tenderness’. There are many people who are ‘clapping’ Francis, he says, but are they doing what he suggests – going to the peripheries and befriending the poorest and receiving the wisdom that the poor can give? The Church will not change because of Francis, he claims, but because of all of us, because of me.

“Today the Church is experiencing humiliation as it retraces pages in its history when Christians acted in contradiction to the Gospel. The violence of the Crusades and their eventual failure was a humiliation, as was the terrible destruction of Constantinople in 1204. In the same way, each of the internal ruptures which mark the history of Christianity left a deep wound, especially the separation of the Roman and Eastern churches in 1054 and the Reformation and the establishment of the Anglican Church, which meant that during the 15th and 16th centuries, half the population of Europe left communion with Rome.... So today the Church does indeed experience humiliation, in the recognition that some of its historical actions have failed to accord with the Gospel. Many of these have taken place within living memory.” pp.16-17

“Can we save the Catholic Church? We can save the Catholic Church!” Hans Kung (2013)

We have already quoted extensively from Fr. Kung’s book in the last Section. It was a book which, at the age of 85, he said he did not want to write but the crisis in the Church was so serious that he had no choice. He casts himself as a physician, diagnosing the problems and recommending the necessary treatment or therapy. For Kung, the greatest Pope of the 20th century was John XXIII, who exercised a papacy of service, not jurisdictional power, and the greatest spiritual event was the Second Vatican Council which laid out a programme of radical reform which later popes somehow backed off from retreating from the collegiality it proposed. It is beyond denial that a great gap has opened up between some official Catholic doctrinal teachings and what many Catholic people actually believe and do. His ‘prescription’ for the ‘patient’ is to make the papacy a service of the servants of God, not a monarchy, set the bishops free and choose better ones, clean up the Roman Curia and put it in its place, bring canon law in line with Vatican II, make celibacy optional, revoke the contraception ban, abolish the Vatican’s doctrinal congregation, ordain women, permit intercommunion and enfranchise the laity – not much really!!

“The constitution of the Church as a clerical hierarchy organised on monarchical principles completely inverts the original ordering of the Church as described in the New

Testament. If we wish to make today's Church more Christian, we need to recover the original order of the Church as outlined in the New Testament. In the New Testament, 'Church' stands for the entire community of faith. According to the New Testament, the Gospel is propagated not by aloof hierarchs or learned theologians, but by simple and humble witnesses, both ordained and non-ordained who give living witness to the person and message of Christ more by their deeds than by their words. It is the community of faith taken as a whole that inspires belief in Jesus Christ, shapes Christian commitment and ensures the enduring, effective presence of Christ's Church in the world by faithfully following Christ in daily life. Not just a select few, not just bishops, clergymen, monks and nuns, but every Christian, whatever his or her standing in the Church or in society, is called to spread the Christian message by living a life according to the gospel. All have been given the same gift of baptism in Jesus' name, the same gift of Eucharistic Communion as a celebration of remembrance, thanksgiving and union, the same assurance of forgiveness for their sins. Day-to-day service and active responsibility for our fellow men and women, for the ecclesial community and for the world as a whole constitute a duty laid upon all." p.119

Mindful no doubt of the name chosen by our new pope, he goes back in history to show how Francis, the 'poverello', the little poor man, showed the papal autocrat (Innocent III) by his whole way of life what living in imitation of Christ is really about, and how relevant such a life would be for the Church today:

"Poverty – Innocent III stood for a Church of wealth and splendour, of greed and financial scandals. The alternative would be an unpretentious, open-handed Church with transparent financial policies, A Church exemplifying inner freedom from material possessions and outward Christian generosity.

Humility – Innocent III stood for a Church of power and domination, of bureaucracy and discrimination, repression and inquisition. The alternative would be a Church marked by humility and humanity, social solidarity, brotherhood and sisterhood, a Church encouraging dialogue and offering hospitality even to non-conformists, whose leadership practises unassuming ministry, not clamping down on new religious impulses and ideas from below, but welcoming them and putting them to fruitful use.

Simplicity – Innocent III stood for a Church with overly complex dogmas, nit-picking moralistic casuistry and legalistic tutorism, ie. the moral principle of always playing on the safe side of the law whatever the cost. All of this was laced together in an all-pervading canon law, an all-knowing scholasticism and an all-pervasive fear of novelties. The alternative would be a Church proclaiming joyful tidings, a theology guided by the gospel and willing to listen rather than indoctrinate, an institutional Church not set over and above, but rather joined in partnership with, the Church of the people of God. Regrettably, the popes failed to follow the example of St. Francis, and their self-inflation was followed by their humiliation. pp.127-8

“The Shape of the Church to Come” by Karl Rahner (1971)

In 1971, Fr. Karl Rahner, the foremost Catholic theologian of the 20th century wrote a little book called “The Shape of the Church to Come”, which was initially aimed at setting a meaningful agenda for the forthcoming Synod of the German Church, but in fact applied equally to the Church as a whole. To read this document over 40 years later is a remarkable experience, because it demonstrates Rahner’s incredible vision of the problems the Church was encountering at the time, would encounter, as well as some necessary steps to be taken to alleviate them. So many of the problems we have been experiencing in the intervening years were clearly foreseen by this incredible man, and his words have a prophetic ring to them, particularly in regard to the course we have been following on “The Servant Church”. “The Shape of the Church to Come” is about the historical and social situation in which the Catholic Church is placed today (1971) in virtue of her environment, in which she must live and fulfil her mission in the light of which, and in regard to which she must make her decisions.

In his translator’s preface Fr. Edward Quinn summarises Rahner’s thinking as laid out in the book thus: *“(Christians) must expect to be a ‘little flock’, not retreating to a ghetto-like existence away from a world sunk in wickedness, but composed of those few who commit themselves with a living faith in Christ to the work of redeeming the world and rely solely on his grace to achieve this.....The authority of the Church, the ‘magisterium’ remains. But it must be much more careful to show that its teaching is rooted in the gospel and not expect people simply to accept the message just because it is given out by authority....The priest retains his important place but he must be prepared to work in a de-clericalized Church, where all except the very limited functions which are his alone may well be exercised by others. He need not be celibate if the right choice for a particular congregation at a particular time would be a leader who is married or free to marry. It is not impossible that women should be ordained in a society where this is acceptable, since it cannot be shown that they were excluded from the priesthood in the past for other than sociological reasons....If we seriously want to bring about a unification of the churches, we simply cannot wait until we have ironed out all doctrinal differences...this should be all the easier because there is already a much closer unity of outlook between practising Christians than denominational statements of faith might suggest. Not that there are so many declarations of this kind....It is unlikely that churches filled with people who come out of habit simply because they were brought up that way, will continue much longer. We shall have to reckon with far smaller numbers, but with more missionary-minded members. Pp.6-8*

Using these texts and the material we have covered throughout this course, we will ask three questions - What has happened? What must not happen? What must happen? – to try to discover whether there could ever realistically be a “Servant Church”.

Session 3 What has happened ?

Some of the material we will cover in this section of the course has already been alluded to in Section 1, but it bears a little repetition and clarification. While this will not be and cannot be an exhaustive description, it will hopefully serve to highlight some common features of our lives today. We need to look at what has happened to our world, and thereby our Church, and the ensuing reaction to it before we can then look at what must and must not happen in the future. We are certainly in an altogether new situation philosophically, technologically, economically and socially and we must face up to it rather than hide from it or pretend it has not happened.

A. Consumerism and Materialism

This has had a devastating effect, especially in the West, especially in how it has changed people's mindset, making them selfish and inward-looking and resulted in the increasing poverty of people in other parts of the world, as Pope Francis points out:

"The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is its desolation and anguish, born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades." (para 2)

"Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a 'throwaway' culture which is now spreading" (para.53).

"In this context some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power...Almost without being aware of it we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime, all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us...One cause of this situation is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person. We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (Ex.32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an

impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose....man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption.” (para.54)

This is not something that Church leaders alone such as the Pope have identified as a major problem; many similarities can be found in the ‘secular’ media. The Guardian columnist George Monbiot referred to this situation in a recent article for his newspaper entitled, “Materialism: a system that eats us from the inside out”:

“That they are crass, brash and trashy goes without saying, but there is something in the pictures posted on Rich Kids of Instagram that inspires more than the usual revulsion towards crude displays of opulence. There is a shadow in these photos – photos of a young man wearing all four of his Rolex watches, a youth posing in front of his helicopter, endless pictures of cars, yachts, shoes, mansions, swimming pools and spoiled white boys throwing gangster poses in private jets – of something worse: something that, after you have seen a few dozen, becomes disorientating, even distressing. The pictures are, of course, intended to incite envy. They reek instead of desperation. The young men and women seem lost in their designer clothes, dwarfed and dehumanised by their possessions, as if ownership has gone into reverse. A girls’ head barely emerges from the haul of Chanel, Dior and Hermes shopping bags she has piled on her vast bed. It’s captioned ‘shoppy shoppy’ ‘and #goldrush’ but a photograph whose purpose is to illustrate plenty seems instead to depict a void. She’s alone with her bags and her image in the mirror, in a scene that seems saturated with despair....An impressive body of psychological research...suggest that materialism, a trait that can affect both rich and poor, and which researchers define as a ‘value system that is preoccupied with possessions and the social image they project’ is both socially destructive and self-destructive. It smashes the happiness and peace of mind of those who succumb to it. It’s associated with anxiety, depression and broken relationships....The two varieties of materialism that have this effect – using possessions as a yardstick of success and seeking happiness through acquisition – are the varieties that seem to be on display on Rich Kids of Instagram...Materialism forces us into comparison with the possessions of others, a race both cruelly illustrated and crudely propelled by that toxic website. There is no end to it. If you have four Rolex’s while another has five, you are one Rolex short of contentment. The material pursuit of self-esteem reduces your self-esteem. I should emphasise that this is not about differences between rich and poor; the poor can be as susceptible to materialism as the rich. It is a general social affliction, visited upon us by government policy, corporate strategy and civic life, and our acquiescence in a system that is eating us from the inside out. This is the dreadful mistake we are making: allowing ourselves to believe that having more money and more stuff enhances our wellbeing, a belief possessed not only by those poor deluded people in the pictures but by almost every member of every government. Worldly ambition, material aspiration, perpetual growth: these are a formula for mass unhappiness.”

Pope Francis continues: *“While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation...A new tyranny is thus born invisible and often virtual which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules....The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule.”* (para.56)

“Behind this attitude lurks a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God. Ethics has come to be viewed with a certain scornful derision. It is seen as counterproductive, too human, since it makes money and power relative. It is felt to be a threat since it condemns the manipulation and debasement of the person. In effect ethics leads to a God who calls for a committed response which is outside the categories of the marketplace.... ‘Not to share one’s wealth with the poorer is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs.’ (S.John Chrysostom)” (para.57)

“When a society –whether local, national or global –is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programmes or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquillity” (para.59)

“Today’s economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric. Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve.” (para.60)

B. Technological Development

It goes without saying that the last 20 years has seen astronomical technological development. When you think back, can you imagine a time without mobile phones, personal computers, I – pad’s and all the assorted technology that goes with them and has now become an integral part of family and personal life. This has also had a huge ‘down side’ in the ability to make relationships, the increase in ‘virtual’ as opposed to ‘real’ friendships, in introspective pre-occupation and so on. How many young people do you spot now without the inevitable attachment to their hands of some mobile communication device, and how often do people sit in company engrossed in the machine rather than paying any attention to the people they are with?

Pope Francis comments: *“The hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation even in the so-called rich countries. The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and often, to live with precious little dignity. This epochal change has*

been set in motion by the enormous qualitative and quantitative, rapid and cumulative advances occurring in the sciences and in technology, and by their instant application in different areas of nature and of life. We are in an age of knowledge and information which has led to new and often anonymous kinds of power “ (para.52).

“In the prevailing culture, priority is given to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional. What is really gives way to appearances. In many countries, globalization has meant a hastened deterioration of their own cultural roots and the invasion of ways of thinking and acting proper to other cultures, which are economically advanced but ethically debilitated.” (para.62)

The Catholic writer and parish priest, Fr.Donal O’Leary, developed this theme in an article in “The Tablet” at the end of January this year (2014), called “Missing the point”:

“Full-blown ‘fomo’ (‘the fear of missing out’) is one of the most insidious social anxieties of our age....The addictive state of mind it refers to is fuelled by our increasing engagement with modern technologies and social networking sites of all kinds. It is more than a deep desire to keep in touch. It carries a compulsive fear of being left out of the loop in terms of the latest fashions, of gossip and gadgets, of popularity among peers, or of keeping ahead of the competition at work. Extreme fomo, in all its shapes and forms, and at any age, is an exhausting, competitive and obsessive mental and emotional condition that can consume people’s energy and seriously affect the quality of their lives.....There are, currently, an increasing amount of reports and warnings about people’s deep fear of losing a sense of themselves, of right relations with others, of getting lost in an impulsive way of living. Social media is seen as a major contributor to this condition....Especially vulnerable are younger people. Addicted to pocket computers, such as smartphones and tablets, anxious teenagers are constantly monitoring their popularity among their peers, tormented by feelings of inadequacy and doubt...Unchecked all of this transparent neurosis can lead to a disastrous loss of privacy, to the torture of being bullied, to self-harm and despair.”

Pope Francis says that seduced and confused by what he calls ‘the new idolatry’ of a culture of consumption and competition, people lose their sense of direction, of self, and ultimately of reality. There is a destruction of the human spirit happening, he says, ‘a process of dehumanisation’ inflicted by these silent assassins of the soul. Fr.O’Leary claims that we are dealing with questions of what he calls, ‘spiritual order’ – namely a sense of one’s identity, origin and destiny. In the deepest part of me, who really am I? In a post-modern, post religion world, there are no easy answers. He continues:

“However driven, drained or damaged people may be, is there not always some inner belief in a feeble flicker of a finer self, a moral, mystical seed, still alive in the depths of their buried life?...Deeper than their heart, their most intimate soul, they carry an

original beauty and blessing, but fearful compulsions and desperate drives keep blocking the hints and traces of that faint but graced awareness.” We will return to this argument later.

C. Secularization

There has been much debate of late in whether Britain in particular is a ‘Christian country’ any longer or not. In an interview with the ‘Daily Telegraph’ in April 2014, Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury, claimed that we have now entered a ‘post-Christian’ but not necessarily a ‘non-Christian’ era. “A Christian nation can sound like a nation of committed believers, and we are not that. Equally, we are not a nation of dedicated secularists”. He claims that we can be considered a Christian nation in the sense of still being very much saturated by this (Christian) vision of the world and shaped by it. “Given that we have a younger generation who know less about this legacy...there may be a further shrinkage of awareness and commitment., but this could also lead to people discovering Christianity afresh. I see signs of that talking to youngsters on school visits. There is a curiosity about Christianity.”

Pope Francis comments: *“The process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal. Furthermore, by completely rejecting the transcendent, it has produced a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin and a steady increase in relativism. These have led to a sense of disorientation, especially in the periods of adolescence and young adulthood, which are so vulnerable to change. As the bishops of the United States of America have rightly pointed out, while the Church insists on the existence of objective moral norms which are valid for everyone, “there are those in our culture who portray this teaching as unjust, that is, opposed to basic human rights. Such claims usually follow from a form of moral relativism that is joined, not without inconsistency, to a belief in the absolute rights of individuals. In this view, the Church is perceived as promoting a particular prejudice and as interfering with individual freedom.” We are living in the information-driven society which bombards us indiscriminately with data – all treated as being of equal importance- and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment. In response, we need to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages development of mature moral values.” (para.64)*

D. The Church’s response

The lesson of history has shown us that when there is a challenge to the place and authority of the Church in contemporary life, this is often followed by an opposite reaction, and to dissension within itself. The situation is not dissimilar today, as Pope Francis demonstrates:

“The Catholic faith of many peoples is nowadays being challenged by the proliferation of new religious movements, some of which tend to fundamentalism while others seem to propose a spirituality without God. This is on the one hand a human reaction to materialist, consumerist and individualistic society, but it is also a means of exploiting the weaknesses of people living in poverty and on the fringes of society, people who make ends meet amid great human suffering and are looking for immediate solutions to their needs... We must recognise that if part of our baptized people lack a sense of belonging to the Church, this is also due to certain structures and the occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some of our parishes and communities or to a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems, be they simple or complex, in the lives of our people. In many places, an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach.” (para.63)

“How many wars take place within the people of God and in our different communities! In our neighbourhoods and in the workplace, how many wars are caused by envy and jealousy, even among Christians! Spiritual worldliness leads some Christians to war with other Christians who stand in the way of their quest for power, prestige, pleasure and economic security. Some are no longer content to live as part of the greater Church community but stoke a spirit of exclusivity, creating an ‘inner circle’. Instead of belonging to the whole Church in all its rich variety, they belong to this or that group which thinks itself different or special.” (para. 98)

This situation was predicted as long ago as 1971 by Karl Rahner: *“The situation of Christians and thus of the Church today is therefore one of transition from a people’s Church... to a Church as that community of believers who critically dissociate themselves... from the current opinions and feelings of their social environment.”* p.23

*“Our present situation is one of transition from a Church sustained by a homogeneously Christian society and almost identical with it, from a people’s Church, to a Church made up of those who have struggled against their environment in order to reach a personally clearly and explicitly reasonable decision of faith. This will be the Church of the future or there will be no Church at all”.*24

“This sketchy characterization of our situation might seem too obvious or too barren if we did not point out that those who hold office and the good, zealous Christians in our Church are generally unwilling to admit this transitional state to a sufficient extent. The basic tendency with us is to defend what has been handed down, not to prepare for a situation which is still to come.” p.27

“In future we must take the risk, not only of a Church with ‘open doors’ but of an ‘open Church’. We cannot remain in the ghetto nor may we return to it...(we are tempted to) ‘purify’ the Church as rapidly as possible and by administrative measures to draw clear frontiers, to ‘restore’ the old order; in a word to enter on the march into the ghetto, even

then the Church would then become not the 'little flock' of the gospel but really a sect with a ghetto mentality. Of course no serious churchman will defend such a march into the ghetto explicitly in the form of a thesis. But there is sufficient evidence of an unreflecting ghetto mentality in our midst which, without an explicit doctrine, is trying to save clarity, order, piety, and orthodoxy by giving the Church a form which in terms of sociology, of religion and political ideas is that of a sect. This sort of sect exists when the far greater majority of such a social group in practice or intentionally withdraws from the public life of society, continues only to protest, only to see around itself a world given up to evil....All those who do not belong to the group are regarded as obviously more or less dangerous enemies." p93

"We have to point out that the Church must be a 'spiritual' Church if it is to remain true to its own nature...If we are honest we must admit that we are to a terrifying extent a spiritually lifeless Church. Living spirituality – which of course still exists today – has withdrawn in a singular way from the public life of the Church and has hidden in small conventicles of the remaining pious people. The Church's public life even today (for all the good will which is not to be questioned) is dominated to a terrifying extent by ritualism, legalism, administration and a boring and resigned spiritual mediocrity continuing along familiar lines." p.82

Hence 'withdrawing' from the world, or stressing its own place of authority and power as used to happen – eg. expressions like "the barque of Peter riding the storm", or "the Church is the lighthouse of truth" – is not an adequate or acceptable way of responding to the growing tide of disbelief. Jean Vanier comments:

"The Church has too often been allied with temporal power; with rulers and the great landowners. And this is where its humiliations have begun, because these alliances are in such contradiction to the Gospel's message of the primacy of love and the honoured place of the least powerful. But has the Church been able to recognise this, or has it ascribed its own humiliations to betrayal by 'the other'? How do any of us behave in the face of humiliation? Do we recognise it, or blame others for betraying us? Would recognition not be a way towards growth in humility and a new encounter with our deepest selves – and from there to a deeper union with Jesus?" p.18

"Pope Benedict XVI was very clear about these (the paedophilia scandals): the most terrible persecutions experienced by the Church come not from outside, but from within, from its own sin, from the infidelity of its own members and their refusal to follow Jesus, who came, with his gentle and humble heart to teach us to live the true relationships that give life to others." p.32

And Hans Kung: *“And so, in the Catholic Church of the 19th and 20th centuries a typical Roman Catholic traditionalism or fundamentalism developed, which believed that everything should and could be left as it was –or must be restored to what it once was... This kind of traditionalism survives into our own day.... No, traditionalism cannot be the Church’s top priority. Rather than an unreserved commitment to some version of the past, the Church needs freedom, a freedom that also manifests itself in a crucial sifting of the Church’s own history..pp.53-4*

Catholicism, as it has evolved historically, and particularly modern Catholicism in its current form, cannot be the yardstick by which the Church measures itself. Many within the Vatican and many external ‘supporters of the Vatican ’ want to commit the Catholic Church to a ‘status quo’ which is both comfortable and profitable to them. And so they reject, always with reference to a ‘higher’ (ie.papal) authority any proposals for change they have adopted for the Church and they rule out any serious reforms to the Church’s teaching and practice: if it is not Roman (ie .if it does not toe the Vatican line) it is not Catholic.... No one who has the slightest idea of the real history of the Church can either ignore its flaws, ruptures and cracks, deny the many contradictions and inconsistencies in its history, or gloss over and excuse them..p.55-56

And Karl Rahner:

“The life-style especially of the higher clergy even today sometimes conforms too much to that of the ‘managers’ in secular society. All the ceremony which distinguishes the office-holder even in the most ordinary circumstances from the mass of the people and other Christians and which has nothing to do with the exercise of his office and stresses his dignity where this is out of place, might well disappear.”p.59

But all is not lost and the story is not entirely a negative one. Here is Pope Francis again:

“I must say first that the contribution of the Church in today’s worlds is enormous. The pain and shame we feel at the sins of some members of the Church and at our own, must never make us forget how many Christians are giving their lives in love. They help so many people to be healed to die in peace in makeshift hospitals. They are present to those enslaved by different addictions in the poorest places on earth. They devote themselves to the education of children and young people. They take care of the elderly who have been forgotten by everyone else. They look for ways to communicate values in hospital environments. They are dedicated in so many other ways to showing an immense love for humanity inspired by God who became man.” (para.76)

“True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.” (para.88)

Session 4 What must not happen ?

Pope Francis says: *“I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world, rather than for her self-preservation.”*(para.27)

It is clear that the vision of our new pope is quite different from that which many of us have become used to within and without the Church community. He is not looking to preserve an institution but to create a community of faith, reaching out with ‘good news’ to the whole world. He demonstrates this not only in what he writes and says but also in what he does, in his whole manner of living and treating people. It is so refreshing but also worrying in that there will be those who cannot accept this ‘prophetic’ vision and may even work against it, even within the Church itself. Nor is it a matter for the Pope alone to tackle. Cardinal Karl Lehmann, former Chairman of the German Bishops’ Conference said recently that we cannot leave everything to the Pope: “We complain that Rome is over-powerful. But the reason why Rome is so strong is because we are too weak... I get very annoyed when we expect everything from the Pope as far as church renewal is concerned but do nothing towards renewal ourselves or just remain silent.. The lifeless complacency of a merely handed-down faith is what results when the dead hand of timid diocesan bishops aborts any initiatives which do not originate from Rome.” Each of us must support him and encourage him and put what he suggests to trial and into practice. So what can we say should not happen if this vision is ever to be realised?

1. No going back

There is to be no going back to where we have been in the past or even in recent times. We need to look humbly at our mistakes, starting from the government of the Church itself and extending to every person who claims to be a follower of Christ. The Pope has started this process with himself:

“Since I too am called to put into practice what I ask of others, I too must think about a conversion of the papacy. It is my duty as Bishop of Rome to be open to suggestions which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelization....The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion....Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.” (para.32)

In a recent homily, quoted by Basil Loftus in the Catholic Times, he said: “how can we move forward if the only decisions we ever seem to make in our lives as followers of Christ are to look backwards and then at best, to stay where we are? If the God I know as an adult is the same as the one I knew as a child, then I have failed to mature in faith.”

There are those who long for the ‘certainty’ of old times when everyone knew where they were and what to do, but this is no longer reflected in modern society, as we have seen, and we cannot retreat into this ‘ghetto’ of thinking where we all feel safe, and as Francis says, ‘there must be no surrendering to nostalgia for the past.’

“In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful but they no longer serve as a means of communicating the gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them. At the same time the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people’s lives.” (para.43)

“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends up being caught in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits that make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: ‘give them something to eat’ (Mk.6:37)” (para.49)

Karl Rahner foresaw this problem very clearly:

“We are at the beginning of the little flock. I say ‘beginning’ because, without being really disturbed in my faith, I am sure that in the next decades the (German) Church will decline quite considerably numerically at least in relation to the total population, and in social influence..... ‘Little flock’ does not mean the same as ghetto or sect, since these are defined not by numbers but by a mentality: a mentality that the Church can afford in the future even less than today, no matter how large or small the numbers in the (German) Church may be or become. When a sectarian or ghetto mentality is propagated among us...under the pretext that we are becoming Christ’s little flock which has to profess the folly of faith and of the cross, it must be fought with the utmost severity in the name of true faith and authentic Christianity. If we talk of the ‘little flock’ to defend our cosy traditionalism and stale pseudo-orthodoxy, in the fear of the mentality of modern man and modern society, if we tacitly consent to the departure of the restless, questioning people from the Church, so that we can return to our repose and orderly life and everything in the Church becomes as it was before, we are propagating, not the attitude

proper to Christ's little flock but a petty sectarian mentality. This is all the more dangerous because it shows up, not under its true name, but in an appeal to orthodoxy, church-loyalty and strict morality. The smaller Christ's flock becomes in the pluralism of modern society, so much the less it can afford a mentality of the ghetto and the sect, so much more open it must be to the outer world, so much more precisely and boldly must it ask in every given case where the frontiers really lie between the Church and an unbelieving world. They certainly do not lie where a diehard traditionalism wants to place them in the most diverse areas of the Church" pp.29-30

Basil Loftus took this up in an article in the Church Times for April 2014:

"A lot of energy is burned up uselessly in fruitless attempts to imitate King Canute and try to turn back the inexorable tide of secular culture by aggressiveness, over-forceful confrontation, and at times criminal behaviour...Francis' approach is not to engage in head-on conflict with secular society, but positively to preach and promote Christian values in a way that in his own words, will 'make hearts burn'. Francis refuses to nail the battle-flag to the mast; he won't come out to fight in a way that risks giving secular society the impression that the Church is vicious, cruel, vindictive and lacking in understanding. Instead he flies the flag of all-embracing love and non-judgmental mercy....And when we, all of us, Christians throughout the world, are admired by that world for the values we hold and practise, then and only then, will it be possible for us to begin to influence others to adopt the same values.

Kung also comments:

"It should not withdraw into itself as a reclusive coterie of 'true Christians' or those true to Rome, focused exclusively on itself or on its clerical leadership" (p.257)

2. No power seeking and centralisation

The thirst for power and control over other has blighted the Church since its earliest days, as we have already demonstrated, but it has no place in the Church which Jesus envisaged for his followers and certainly no place in any Church of today. We have seen only too well how disastrous have been the effects of this quest through the centuries and how attempts to subjugate or to force its members into service, hence 'subservience' have failed miserably. In an article in 'The Tablet' for March 8 2014, commemorating Pope Francis' first year in office, the former president of Ireland and herself an experienced canon lawyer, Mary McAleese said: "Church governance was the same unreformed creaking feudal monarchy when Francis became Pope as it had been for generations before the Second Vatican Council", and she quotes the American archbishop John Quinn from as far back as 1996: "Large segments of the Catholic Church as well as many Orthodox and other Christians do not believe that collegiality and subsidiarity are being practiced in the Catholic Church in a sufficiently meaningful way". "Until now,"

McAleese says, “the centre has believed it could only hold through primatialism, and unquestioning obedience to the exclusively top-down teaching Magisterium. That tight grip approach has had very damaging consequences for the Church in the modern world,” and the Pope himself had said, “eventually people get tired of authoritarianism...and the excessive centralisation which rather than proving helpful complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.”

However, there are still those who think that this is the only way to ensure that Our Lord’s Church can survive and flourish, as Pope Francis claims:.

“This way of thinking also feeds the vainglory of those who are content to have a modicum of power and would rather be the general of a defeated army than a mere private in a unit which continues to fight. How often do we dream up vast apostolic projects, meticulously planned, just like defeated generals! But this is to deny our history as a Church which is glorious precisely because it is a history of sacrifice, of hopes and daily struggles, of lives spent in service and fidelity to work, tiring as it may be...Instead we waste time talking about what ‘needs to be done’ like spiritual masters and pastoral experts who give instructions from on high. We indulge in endless fantasies and we lose contact with the real lives and difficulties of our people.” (para.96)

“Those who have fallen into this worldliness look on from above and afar; they reject the prophecy of their brothers and sisters, they discredit those who raise questions, they constantly point out the mistakes of others and they are obsessed with appearances. Their hearts are open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests, and as a consequence they neither learn from their sins nor are they genuinely open to forgiveness. This is a tremendous corruption disguised as a good. We need to avoid it by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor. God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! This stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God.” (para.97)

Basil Loftus, in one of his brilliant weekly articles for the Catholic Times, said that Pope Francis wants to change the mindset of the straitjacket and replace it with the mindset of the life-jacket: “We cannot bring about the seismic change which lies ahead of us if all we can stir up in the Church is lethargy and apathy. Brave and bold experimentation, some of which, inevitably will later need to be fine-tuned, is the only way forward....Certainly lowering the octane-rating of Vatican bureaucrats could well encourage diocesan bishops to stand their ground in disagreeing with them” (23 March 2014)

It is not only in his written words that Francis gives us something to think about, but often in ‘asides’ or the short homilies he gives at daily Mass. Here is an extract from the Catholic Times of May 11 2014, which demonstrates his feelings on the thirst for power and ambition in the Church:

“The Catholic Church is no place for ‘climbers’, who want to reach the heights of prestige, power and profit, Pope Francis said. Instead of putting their sights on the Church, such people should set off for the Alps for a healthier way to get to the top...In his homily the Pope said people should ask themselves why they follow Jesus. Because everyone is marked by sin and faced with temptation, he said, people should reflect on their true motivation for being part of the Church and being Christian. It should never be for prestige, power or profit but purely out of love for Jesus...Unfortunately there are Christians who like to ‘strut around like real peacocks,’ full of vanity and the need to show off. ‘Vanity is dangerous because it makes us slip immediately into pride and arrogance and then it is all over.’ ‘How do I follow Jesus? Do I hide the good things I do or do I like showing off?’ It is an important question for priests and bishops too, he said, because a ‘vain pastor is not good for the people of God.’ It doesn’t matter if someone is ordained a bishop or a priest, if they ‘like vanity’, he said, they are not following Jesus. Some Christians – some unconsciously –are after power. ‘There are climbers in the Church! There are many who knock on the door of the Church looking for some sort of advantage...But if you don’t mind, head north and do some alpine climbing. It’s healthier! Don’t come to the Church to do your climbing!!’ Christians should ask themselves whether they would be willing to follow Christ all the way ‘to the cross’, he said, ‘or do I seek power and use the Church a little, use the Christian community, the parish, the diocese to have a little bit of power?’ Christians should also avoid exploiting the Church for money or profit, emphasised Pope Francis. It is a temptation that has existed from the time of the early Christian community, he said. Pope Francis asked people to pray for the Lord’s help and grace always to seek and follow Christ with the intention of loving him ‘and only him, without vanity, without craving power and without longing for money.’”

Jean Vanier alludes to what has happened as a result of what have come to be called the ‘abuse scandals’:

“The humiliation here was born of historical circumstances, which produced a reversal and it applies equally to any group, church or culture, previously dominant, or at least recognised as such, which suddenly finds itself in the opposite position. Now it is wounded because it is despised, its human value no longer recognised, and it experiences this in a flood of shame, self-loathing, depression or anger. The sense of humiliation can become the more violent when the faults of this previously superior group reveal its own poverty and impotence. Its attempts to reclaim superiority only show its weakness, and these attempts seem more and more insulting to those who witness them.” p.14

Later in his book, he returns to this theme:

“(There is a..) distinction between power and authority. Power imposes, it is the capacity to influence and modify the other through bypassing or crushing their conscience. Authority is linked to growth, a type of power which can help people develop their own sense of responsibility, their creativity, their personal conscience and their freedom...”
p.80

“At what moment does the exercise of power become abusive? First of all when fear of losing it invades the individual or the group, and they feel threatened.” p.86

“Our tendency is to want to ‘rise above’, to show that we exist and are better than others; we want to be admired and recognised as important. Without this recognition, who are we? To live, and live in the eternity of God’s life, we have to accept not ‘succeeding’ within our own culture. If we are to take the path of humility and live in eternal life, in God’s own life, we have to suffer loss. We have to give up wanting the last word to prove that we are better than the rest.” p.132

Again, Karl Rahner, foresaw this situation and what would happen because of it:

“We are not merely uttering pious platitudes, fit only for Sunday sermons, when we say that the Church must not be concerned with serving others merely for the sake of proving her own claims and that she must stand by the side of the poor, the oppressed, life’s failures. But does the reality correspond to the sacred principle, the principle that the Church has to be there for all and therefore also for the others, that she must serve even those who attach no importance to her and regard her as a relic from a vanished age?”
p.63

And Hans Kung puts the problem succinctly in the modern era:

“The Church as a whole should not take the form of an apparatus of power; it is not a hierarchically structured religious corporation that seeks its own profit and constantly hinders internal dialogue and democracy; it should be the people of God, the body of Christ and a global and local spiritual community”. p.25

3. No ritualism and pre-occupation with liturgy

It is quite clear that the centralised Church has created its own image as well as its own ‘power structure’. This image is characterised by an over-riding concern with the minutiae of liturgical practice and over grandiose liturgical celebrations, as if to emphasise, in a way not dissimilar to that of the Counter Reformation period, the ‘otherness’ and ‘authority’ of the Church and its officials. Pope Francis has taken particular note of this situation and set out his stall very clearly to remedy it:

“There are times when the faithful, listening to completely orthodox language, take away something alien to the authentic gospel of Jesus Christ, because that language is often alien to their own way of speaking to an understanding one another.”(para.41)

“In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church’s prestige, but without any concern that the gospel will have a real impact on God’s faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time. In this way, the life of the Church turns into a museum piece or something which is the property of a select few. In others this spiritual worldliness lurks behind a fascination with social or political gain, or pride in their ability to manage practical affairs or an obsession with programmes of self-help and self-realization. It can also translate into a concern to be seen, into a social life full of appearances, meetings, dinners and receptions. It can also lead to a business mentality, caught up with management, statistics, plans and evaluations, whose principal beneficiary is not God’s people but the Church as an institution. The mark of Christ incarnate, crucified and risen is not present; closed and elite groups are formed and no effort is made to go forth and seek out those who are distant or the immense multitudes who thirst for Christ. Evangelical fervour is replaced by the empty pleasure of complacency and self-indulgence.” (para.93)

This is a problem recognised also by Jean Vanier . . .

“Has our faith truly reached into our bodies and hearts or is the Church in danger of closing itself off by over-identifying with its rituals. Without a real and deep transformation of hearts, faith changes nothing in life; it envisages neither a new vision nor a new world. The encounter with the poor and those who are vulnerable brings a transformation that is simultaneously spiritual, social and profoundly human. We have to find a new wisdom, new ways of life, based on this experience.” P.121

. . .and Hans Kung

“If the Church wants to regain people’s trust as a Church of service, it must provide pastoral liturgies – from baptism to confirmation, from the celebration of communion to funerals – in a form that is understandable and appealing to all who participate.” p.258

No church community at prayer, wherever it may be, can offer authentic praise to God if its ministers are clothed in extravagant vestments, preening themselves about the sanctuary like some monarchs of the past or the participants in the ‘epic’ films of David Lean or Cecil B. De Mille, the music is entirely sung by large choirs in an unintelligible foreign language, and the ministers preoccupy themselves with the cleaning of vessels like the pre-occupation with ritualistic cleanliness for which Our Lord castigated the Pharisees.

4. No clericalism or exclusivity

The Pope has spoken frequently in the words of the Second Vatican Council that the Church “is, or should return to being the People of God”. There should therefore be no sense of ‘superiority’ on the part of the clergy as is often instanced in the liturgical exhibitionism detailed above, nor any sense of feeling that we are somehow more favoured in the Lord’s eyes than those members of the other communities who profess his name, and indeed of those world traditions who call God by another name. He is at pains to point out that we are all equal in the sight of God and no one is more important or more favoured than anyone else.

“A missionary heart...never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness. It realizes that it has to grow in its own understanding of the gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit, and so it always does what good it can, even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street (para.45)

“ The Church is called to be the house of the Father with its doors always wide open.” (para.47)

Karl Rahner noticed that this situation of ‘separate identity’ had developed between laity and clergy and also between the churches and wrote eloquently about it:

“To church officials I say: suppose that you are not a church official, that you are earning your living as a dustman or (if you prefer) as a biochemist working in a laboratory where there is never a word about God all day and yet results are obtained of which you can be proud. Imagine that your head is weary from the clatter of dustbins or from molecular physics and its mathematics. Imagine that this situation of yours were to last more or less a whole lifetime and that you had not been involved in it merely in the course of your missionary activity. And now try to give these people in this environment the message of Christianity, try to preach Jesus’ message of eternal life. Listen how you tell it, judge for yourselves how it sounds, reflect how you ought to tell it if it is not to be rejected as these people might reject someone talking about Tibetan medicine... How would you speak of Jesus in such a way that another person can get some idea of the importance he has in your life, his real meaning for you, a meaning which is also relevant to the life which these others lead? Would not many of the words which we now hand out from the pulpit, unthinkingly, without more ado, stick in our throats? p.83

Have you ever once spoken of the joy of the Holy Spirit in the light of the true unvarnished situation?...Have you ever once experienced the terror that makes your heart stop when you hear yourself and when your pious and learned words sound even to yourself like intolerable bla-bla? Have you ever really come once through this inferno? Where are the tongues of fire talking about God and his love? Where do men speak of the

'commandments' of God not as a duty to be painfully observed but as a glorious liberation of man from the enslavement of mortal fear and frustrating egoism? p.85

He also commented on those who were made to feel outside the Church for whatever reason:

"There is no point in giving a person who is now in touch with the Church but has some reservations, the impression at every moment, that he is really only a tolerated 'guest', and not a full member of this believing community and society." pp.100-101

And on how he felt the 'Ecumenical Movement' might gainfully proceed towards 'unity' not 'uniformity'

"First of all we should not underestimate what has already been achieved in the Ecumenical Movement...In a pluralistic society embracing the whole world, the real possibilities within our horizon do not include bringing all those interested in Christianity who are baptized and call themselves Christians into one and the same Church.ie. not a 'quantitative enlargement of the Catholic Church through the incorporation of other Churches into ours.' p.102

"There is an obligation on all Christians to strive for the unity of the Church which cannot simply be postponed till the last day, and yet it can scarcely be denied that the Ecumenical Movement seems to be stagnating (apart from a more intense co-operation of the Churches in the service of the world). Most Christians are pre-occupied with their internal difficulties and almost absorbed by these and thus not a few churchmen may even find this stagnation by no means undesirable" . p.104

Again, Hans Kung, puts the matter succinctly and directly in what has come to be his own inimitable way:

"Church offices should not take the form of a 'well-ordered battle formation' or 'holy leadership', but should see themselves as offering service to the people of God." p.256

5. No over-concern with 'issues'

The media would love the Pope to speak more frequently about moral rather than social matters, sex rather than justice, because these are what sell papers and seem to arouse people's interest and often anger, but he has managed to resist the pressure. This is not because these matters are not important, but they are not the most important matter, which is the proclamation of the gospel. An 'issue' is something which arises out of something else and this is precisely the case here; we should be concerned with what they arise from – faith in a loving God and living in his way – rather than concentrating our attention entirely on them. Furthermore, a love of 'soundbites' has overtaken modern communication and there appears to be little time for the consideration of an issue at any

depth. Papal pronouncements on contraception, abortion, same-sex marriage, welcome though they may be under this present pope, are not what is going to create a Servant Church in the way the Lord wants, but do have their place in its future.

“In today’s world of instant communication and occasionally biased media coverage, the message we preach runs a greater risk of being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects. In this way, certain issues which are part of the Church’s moral teaching are taken out of the context which gives them their meaning. The biggest problem is when the message we preach then seems identified with those secondary aspects which, important as they are, do not in and of themselves convey the heart of Christ’s message. (para.33)

“Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful and most grand, most appealing and at the same time, most necessary” (para.34)

Francis isolates much of the problem as stemming from what has come to be called ‘moral relativism’, namely an ethical law that is entirely determined subjectively rather than from any other source – we then become our own law-makers and, as a consequence of course, never fail or do wrong in our own eyes.

“We also evangelise when we attempt to confront the challenges which can arise. On occasion, these can take the forms of attacks on religious freedom, or new persecutions directed against Christians; in some countries, these have reached alarming levels of hatred and violence.... We should recognise how in a culture where each person wants to be bearer of his or her own subjective truth, it becomes difficult for citizens to devise a common plan which transcends individual gain and personal ambitions” (para.61)

6. Don’t ignore ‘the poor’

The Pope’s concern that we should be a ‘Church of the poor and for the poor’ has become something of a mantra. His background working in the slums of Buenos Aires makes him uniquely placed as the leader of the Catholic Church to understand this huge problem which was for so long neglected in a history of introspection. He cannot foresee a Church of the future without this essential element of its work, prayer and energy. Karl Rahner alluded to it more than 40 years ago:

“Christians on the whole have not yet become aware of this situation. They are all right and they are too short sighted to see their more distant neighbour who is not all right. The will to face the problem of the Third World does not mean merely being ready to make a larger personal contribution to the funds of one of the relief organisations or to

grumble a little less as a taxpayer about the amount allotted (small enough in itself) in the state's budget to development aid." p.130

Likewise Hans Kung:

"Of course the Church should courageously and intelligently take a public stand for Christian values in today's pluralistic secular society, but this should always be done in the context of the values shared by all human beings." p.257-8

7. Hans Kung's conclusions

At the conclusion of what Hans Kung claims will almost certainly be his last work (he is now 86 years old and suffering from Parkinson's Disease and macular degeneration of the eyes), he sets forth four features of what needs to be avoided and what needs to be pursued if we are to create (not continue!) the Church Our Lord intended:

"A Church which continually looks back to the Middle Ages or to the time of the Reformation and is uncritically enamoured of the Enlightenment and a classic Modernity can hardly be saved; but a Church orientated towards its Christian origins while concentrating on the urgent tasks of our time, can indeed survive and flourish again.

A Church paternalistically committed to a stereotypical idea of women, to the use of exclusively masculine language, and of pre-defined gender roles, can hardly be saved; but a Church based on partnership, combining office and charisma and accepting the participation of women in all ecclesial offices, can indeed survive and flourish again.

A Church addicted to an ideologically narrow, denominationalist exclusivity and to an illegitimate exercise of usurped authority, refusing to recognise the need for co-operation and communion, can hardly be saved; but an ecumenically open Church, which not only mouths ecumenical phrases, but also practises ecumenical deeds in matters such as recognizing ministries and removing the questionable excommunications of the past, and which goes on to give tangible expression to its ecumenical content, can indeed survive and flourish.

A Eurocentric Church, that maintains claims to imperial domination of other cultural expressions of Christianity by subjecting them to the oversight of a Vatican bureaucracy as the ultimate spiritual authority, can hardly be saved, but a tolerant universal Church:

- *Which is willing to respect the ever-increasing diversity of possibilities for expressing the one abiding truth;*
- *Which is willing to learn from other religions and from people with no religion;*

- Which is willing to share its authority with national, regional and local churches, following the principle of subsidiarity that allows the higher instance to intervene only when the lower fails;
- And in this way regains the respect of people – of Christians and non-Christians alike – such a Church can indeed survive and flourish! p.334

In so doing, he echoes the words of his friend and colleague, Karl Rahner, 40 years beforehand:

“The Church then must remain the Church of mystery and of the evangelical joy of redeemed freedom. She may not be reduced to a humanitarian welfare association...The Church is concerned from first to last with God....There must be talk of God in order to give him glory. In this way and only in this way will the message of God be able to show its liberating power.” p.86

Session 5 What must happen ?

Pope Francis began his exhortation by setting out clearly what he thought needed to happen to the Church and to all of us:

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them...The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk” (para.3)

“Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being.” (para.8)

“If we wish to live a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good.” (para.9)

“Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world.” (para.11)

“Ordinary pastoral ministry seeks to help believers to grow spiritually so that they can respond to God’s love ever more fully in their lives.....Christians have the duty to proclaim the gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as a people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction.” (para.15)

Pope Francis has repeatedly put his vision of the Church and thereby 'The Servant Church' before us in so many of the things he has done and said. Looking at the above, we can pick out some essential elements: personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ; letting God 'bring us beyond ourselves'; reaching out to and seeking the good of others; returning to the 'original source' of the gospel and proclaim it joyfully to everyone without excluding everyone. Clearly, we cannot go on as we have been doing – members of the Church in the West are dropping dramatically, people are obviously becoming more 'secular' and apparently disinterested in religion and faith, and fewer and fewer people are seeking to serve the Lord in the priesthood and religious life. So we need to ask ourselves a painful question: are we seeking to enlarge the Church and its membership or taking the risk of preaching the gospel as Pope Francis suggests? The homily of Archbishop Malcolm McMahon on the occasion of his installation as Archbishop of Liverpool on May 1st 2014 (see Appendix 13) gives many clues to what is required. He used his meditation on the person of St. Joseph to produce a broad outline of what must happen in the Church of the future:

"The secret of everything is to let yourself be carried by the Lord and to carry the Lord"

"Our principal task as Christians is to make that message known, (ie. Jesus is my Saviour) to make Jesus present in the world of today. To do this, we must be ready, like Joseph, to break with convention, and do things differently. Joseph teaches us that everything we say and do in our personal and family lives, our parishes and schools, our convents and chaplaincies, must have as its purpose and its end the proclamation of Jesus as Lord, for he is the source and the summit of our lives. Taking risks to proclaim the good news of salvation is the task before us as much here in the Archdiocese of Liverpool as elsewhere. Breaking with structures and conventions that give us comfort, that feed our complacency and dull our sensitivity to the demands of being a Christian, is what it means to be a missionary disciple."

Quoting Pope Francis, he said: *"'All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized.' The task of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ is for all of us. We are all called to carry the Lord and be carried by the Lord."*

"Guided by the Holy Spirit, we must work together, as Bishop, priests and people, to continue to hand on the Deposit of Faith, to build up the Body of Christ, to worship God in spirit and truth, and to serve our brothers and sisters. So let us dream together about how we can better proclaim Jesus as Lord in our own lives, in our parishes, and in our Diocese. And we are called to dream this dream joyfully, filled with the hope which the Risen Lord gives his Church, and never giving in to the temptation to misery or despair, even when it seems we are swimming against the tide."

“Finding fulfilment for our God-given gifts of creativity and service, not giving in to pastimes and leisure activities, chasing the false gods of materialism and self-satisfaction, but being mindful of the obligations of social justice, is a challenge that faces the whole of society and not just the Church.”

“ My prayer today is that all of us, each and every one of us, will make the preaching of the Gospel our primary task. Just as the vocation to be holy, to be saints, is not for the chosen few but for the multitude for whom Christ shed his Blood, so too is the proclamation of Christ in the world in which we live. We proclaim it in our words, in the way in which we speak to and about one another; in our actions, in the way in which we treat other people and serve them; and in our worship, when we gather in the awesome presence of God to worship him in spirit and truth.”

“To be a Christian is a real challenge in the world in which we live, but it is a joyful, hope-filled and life-giving challenge for which we are prepared by Christ, who gives us the grace of the sacraments to give our lives in his service to the greater glory of God. Together let us accept that challenge, and promise Christ, whoever we are, that we will be carried by him, and carry him, in every moment and aspect of our lives.”

Here is a bishop who is telling us that we must not be afraid to take risks, to break existing structures and conventions in the preaching of the gospel and the living out of our faith. He has taken as his example, the approach of the Pope in stressing the joyful evangelisation of the world:

“The joy of the gospel is for all people; no one can be excluded.”(para.23)

Continuing with the theme of no exclusion, no centralisation and no clericalism from the last section, Pope Francis, describes a church that is concerned for the poor and not for itself, democratic and ‘collegial’ and outward looking in the field of ‘evangelization’:

“An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep’ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this might prove to be...Finally and evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always.” (para.24)

He looks humbly and realistically at the role of Church teaching and those who exercise it:

“Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local bishops in the discernment of every issue

which arises in their territory. In this sense I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralization'" (para.16)

"Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful and most grand, most appealing and at the same time, most necessary." (para.34)

Likewise, he considers the Church's view of itself:

"Paul VI invited us to deepen the call to renewal and to make it clear that renewal does not only concern individuals but the entire Church. Let us return to a memorable text which continues to challenge us: 'The Church must look with penetrating eyes within herself, ponder the mystery of her own being... This vivid and lively self-awareness inevitably leads to a comparison between the ideal image of the Church as Christ envisaged her and loved her as his holy and spotless bride (Cf. Eph.5:27), and the actual image which the Church presents to the world today... This is the source of the Church's heroic and impatient struggle for renewal: the struggle to correct those flaws introduced by her members which her own self-examination, mirroring her exemplar, Christ, points out to her and condemns' (Ecclesiam Suam para.9-11)" (para.27)

For all this, the Church must not be afraid to speak the truth even if we become unpopular because of it:

"Despite the tide of secularism which has swept our societies in many countries – even those where Christians are a minority – the Catholic Church is considered a credible institution by public opinion, and trusted for her solidarity and concern for those in greatest need. Again and again the Church has acted as a mediator in finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defence of life, human and civil rights and so forth, and how much good has been done by Catholic schools and universities around the world.! This is a good thing. Yet we find it difficult to make people see that when we raise other questions less palatable to public opinion, we are doing so out of fidelity to precisely the same convictions about human dignity and the common good." (para.65)

Here is an echo of the prophetic words of Karl Rahner, written over 40 years ago:

"The task of the Church, to exist for men and not for herself, is not merely directed to making men Christians in the sense of churchgoing people... the wish to bring people into the Church, therefore, must be a determination to make these churchgoing Christians serve everyone, even those who are ready to accept their services but who nevertheless despise and oppose them: the poor too, the old, the sick, those who have come down in

the world, the people on the edge of society, all who have no power themselves and can bring no increase of power to the Church.” p.62

“Only when the message of the living God is preached in the churches with all the power of the Spirit will the impression disappear that the Church is merely an old relic from the age of a society doomed to decline.” p.87

The Church of Jesus Christ

Whatever we think about how the Church might be, it has to be the Church of the Lord, serving him and through him the Father in heaven. This what we mean by the word, ‘encounter’ and this is what we mean by ‘community of believers’, as Jean Vanier points out:

“The true mission (of the Church) is to recognise our faults, and encounter the other with humility, respect and love, as Jesus did. The Christian faith is not an ideal divorced from reality; it is an encounter with Jesus which invites us to live our encounters with others in reality and humility.” p.21

“Some churchmen find it hard to know which culture they want to belong to: that of the Gospel and humility or the less certain one of social achievement, the approbation of superiors and the peremptory assertion of a certain Christian ideal which is divorced from reality...The danger for them is to take refuge in a certain cult of power and certainty, for fear of humiliation or of meeting people whose vulnerability mirrors their own.” pp.24-5

“I believe that the true sign of sanctity today lies in the ‘sacrament’ of encounter. Faith is not the preaching of an ideal life, but above all a meeting with one person: Jesus... this requires a transparency, a purification of our lives. We aren’t here either to change or convert the other. That is the work of Jesus because faith is a gift of God and not an expression of power and superiority.” pp.27-8

“But faith isn’t simply a matter of belief in dogma and regulation. To have faith is to believe in, place our confidence in, a person; for Christians, that is Jesus.” p.38

And Hans Kung endorses this view:

“Put in a nutshell, the Church can best be defined as the community of believers in Christ: the community of persons who are committed to Jesus Christ and to his cause and who actively bear witness to him as the hope for the world. The Church’s credibility depends on preaching the Christian message first of all to itself and only then to others. To do this, the Church must not only preach Jesus’ demands, it must also live them. Thus the Church’s entire credibility depends on being faithful to Jesus Christ” p.252.

The Humble Church

This is a Church that recognises its own failure and mistakes and faces up to them in humility, a Church Karl Rahner clearly prophesied:

“As Christians we are aware that we are sinful men, always conceited, proud, self-assured. We must first and last remind ourselves and our friends of this fact and not only hold it against those with whom we don’t agree.” p.39

Pope Francis took up Rahner’s notion of the Church as a ‘little flock’ thus:

“Here and now, especially where we are a ‘little flock’ (Lk.12:32) the Lord’s disciples are called to live as a community which is the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt.5:13-16). We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the gospel” (para.92)

And Vanier illustrates what this ‘new way of living’ might mean:

“The renewal of the Church and the new evangelisation are carried through encounters with people who are broken by suffering and isolation.” p.124

“Jesus washes the feet of his disciples with tenderness and love. He touches their feet not out of duty like a slave, but lovingly. And he tells them that they too should do what he has done, in memory of him. They should set out on a path of poverty, humility and service. Isn’t this a radically new path? These men who are at the origin of the Church must become servants of the excluded and the poor. These are the people who are calling them. The way of the Church is the way of humility, orientated towards service to those who are excluded and socially insignificant.” p.138

The Church of the ‘poor’ and for ‘the poor’

This is a constant theme of Pope Francis, and echoes the words of the great Jean Vanier, who has spent most of his life working with ‘the poor’, who are vulnerable people:

“The people...who have so often been rejected and despised – are not God’s “poor little children”, whom we have to look after. They have a special mission to humanity and to the Church. They have a gift to convey. They help us to discover a new vision for society and for the Church. It will take decades to see all the consequences of listening to the least powerful among us and allowing ourselves to be led by them....But if the Church is to discover and live the riches that the Council offers, if what the Holy Spirit is preparing is to come to birth, something defensive, in-turned and narrow in the Church’s own vision today has to disappear. .. Perhaps we have to become humbler yet before his prayer for the unity of all Christians and all the men and women of the world can be realised.” p.9

“Pope Francis said, “how I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor.” ...the Pope must “open his arms to protect all of God’s people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least

A Church ‘in’ but not ‘of’ the world

Pope Francis says: “Today our challenge is not so much atheism as the need to respond adequately to many people’s thirst for God, lest they try to satisfy it with alienating solutions or with a disembodied Jesus who demands nothing of us with regard to others. Unless these people find in the Church a spirituality which can offer healing and liberation, and fill them with life and peace, while at the same time summoning them to fraternal communion and missionary fruitfulness, they will end up by being taken in by solutions which neither make life truly human nor give glory to God.” (para.89)

And Karl Rahner: “The possibility of winning new Christians from a milieu which has become unchristian is the sole living and convincing evidence that even today Christianity still has a real chance for the future.”p.32

Secular society consists of historically, culturally and socially diverse groups which exist at the same moment of time but are not historically or culturally simultaneous; hence the style of Christianity appropriate to each group is different.p.36

An Ecumenical Church

Despite the failure of ‘negotiations on high’ to resolve ecumenical differences, even the most painful one, the Christians ‘on the ground’ has been getting on with it for years, in their marriages, their living and working together in community (cf. Taizé, L’Arche, etc) and in the simple things that Christians do together, be it demonstrating for what is right, running soup kitchens or homeless shelters, supporting refugees or whatever, to say nothing of the countless occasions they actually pray together and thus give Our Lord the opportunity to do what he wants to do with and for them:

“I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer and radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another and how you encourage and accompany one another...Beware of the temptation of jealousy! We are all in the same boat and headed to the same port! Let us ask for the grace to rejoice in the gifts of each, which belong to all!” (para.94)

“ Those wounded by historical divisions find it difficult to accept our invitation to forgiveness and reconciliation, since they think that we are ignoring their pain or are asking them to give up their memory and ideals. But if they see the witness of authentically fraternal and reconciled communities, they will find that witness luminous and attractive. It always pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities,

and even consecrated persons, can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs, even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts. Whom are we going to evangelise if this is the way we act?" (para.100)

Forty years ago and more, Karl Rahner could see these issues without clutter:

"There is an obligation on all Christians to strive for the unity of the Church which cannot simply be postponed till the last day, and yet it can scarcely be denied that the Ecumenical Movement seems to be stagnating (apart from a more intense co-operation of the Churches in the service of the world). Most Christians are pre-occupied with their internal difficulties and almost absorbed by these and thus not a few churchmen may even find this stagnation by no means undesirable." p.104

Hans Kung places the challenge in the hands of Christians of all denominations and not simply those within the Roman Catholic Church:

"Is such a Church at all capable of steering a path into the future that allows it both to preserve the original message of Christianity and express it anew? And this brings us to the crucial point: the challenge to reform is addressed not only to the Catholic Church but to every church that considers itself Christian; the Protestant and Orthodox churches are likewise not sanctuaries immune to similar criticism. The crucial question is always the same: does one's Church faithfully incorporate and reflect the original Christian message, the Gospel, which to all intents and purposes is Jesus Christ himself, to whom each church appeals as its ultimate authority? Or is it merely a church system with a Christian label... Without a concrete and consequent return to the historical Jesus Christ, to his message, his behaviour and his fate... a Christian church – whatever its name – will have neither true Christian identity nor relevance for human beings and society. For Catholics, that means that all the many Roman Catholic institutions, dogmas, doctrines, ceremonies and activities must be measured according to the criterion of whether they are 'Christian' in the strict sense of the word, or at the very least not 'anti-Christian'; in short, whether or not they are in agreement with the Gospel. This is what many people in the Church are hoping for when they say to themselves: our Church must become more Christian again, must once again model itself on the Gospel, on Jesus Christ himself." pp.57-8

A 'democratic' Church

We cannot and should not continue with a Church that is hierarchically ordered. The Vatican Council and Pope Francis have made this quite clear. Any future Church will have to be a 'democratic' one, where everyone is regarded equally and treated with equal respect. There is not hierarchy in heaven, so why should we have one today?

“Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God. The minority – ordained ministers – are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and great fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the celebration of the faith. At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making.” (para.102)

Furthermore, it is no longer justifiable to marginalise women and their role just because Jesus first apostles happened to be men:

“The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skills which they, more than men, tend to possess. I think, for example, of the special concern which women show to others, which finds a particular, even if not exclusive, expression in motherhood. I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more inclusive female presence in the Church” (para.103)

“Its (the priesthood) key and axis is not power understood as domination, but the power to administer the sacrament of the Eucharist; this is the origin of its authority which is always a service to God’s people.” (para.104)

Karl Rahner emphasised this years ago:

“Office is to be respected in the Church, but those who love, who are unselfish, who have a prophetic gift in the Church, constitute the real Church and are far from being always identified with the office-holders..... (a declericalized Church is) a Church in which the Spirit breathes where he will and that he has not arranged an exclusive and permanent tenancy with them....If we also remember that the Church of the future must grow in its reality quite differently from the past, from below, from groups of those who have come to believe as a result of their own free, personal decision, then what is meant hereby a declericalization may become clearer.” p.57

And Hans Kung sees ‘democracy’ as essential is we are to be the Church that follows Jesus, our Saviour:

“The name of Jesus Christ is like a golden thread in the often torn and besmirched (and therefore constantly cleaned and rewoven) fabric of the Church in the course of its history. So...Can we save the Catholic Church? Yes we can, but only if the Spirit of Jesus Christ moves our whole community of faith anew and endows the leadership of the Church with new credibility, understanding and acceptance. That, in turn, depends on those of us who together constitute this community of believers and who are open to the breath of the Holy Spirit, which moves where and as it wills. “ p.65

“While the New Testament strictly avoided giving either royal or sacred titles to office-holders within the Church, it quite freely applied such titles to all believers collectively, describing them as a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people (1 Pet.2:9)and as being made a ‘kingdom of priests serving our God’(Rev.5:10).Right from the start, there were numerous offices in the Christian community, often described as ‘charisms’ or ‘callings’. Such offices could be either permanent or temporary. First and foremost among the permanent office-holders were the apostles. In the gospels the apostles are generally identified with ‘the Twelve’ ie. those first disciples whom Jesus had called at the beginning of his public life.....whatever the names and precise functions, all of these permanent offices were essentially pastoral ministries intended to serve the Church by providing guidance and leadership. It was this servant character of church leadership that gave the office-holders (bishops, priests and others) their special authority. Thus the pastoral ministers do not constitute a ruling class in the Church enjoying a unilateral right to lord it over the faithful who owe them unilateral obedience. The pastoral leaders do not exercise a ruling domination but instead a ministry of service. They do not represent a power structure, but rather a special kind of structure defined by their serving role in the community – a ‘servant structure’ ...this servant structure can be likened to a skeleton which holds up the body of the Church, supporting all the other organs in the body, and keeping the Church together and upright.’ pp.245-6

Jean Vanier locates this sense of ‘democracy’ in the notion of ‘community’:

“If community has always been seen as important in the life of the Church and society, today it is crucial. I would say that it is now absolutely necessary for the growth of a healthy exercise of authority and of faith and love as well.” p.94

“Community is the place where communion is made manifest and where we grow in communion. It is a place of deep humanity. To be a true community we must, from time to time, come together and share something personal, something of ourselves.” p.95

An ‘open’ Church

Karl Rahner, in looking to the future clearly thought differently from many of his contemporaries and even from the so-called ‘thinkers’ of today:

“Group members are hypersensitive to criticism within their own ranks and particularly to criticism of office-holders, calling far too quickly and too readily for solidarity in order to stand up to the ‘enemies’. If the Church is not to become to some extent a sect of this kind, it must become and remain an open Church.” p.94

“Theologically it is not so easy to say who is concretely and ‘subjectively’ really in the Church by his faith and who is not. In the light of this alone, the Church is an open Church whether she wants to be or not.”p.98

“The Church in her proclamation must always be making new efforts to incorporate fully those who do not yet belong completely to the Church, even though we generally regard them as such because they are ‘practising’.” p.99

Hans Kung speaks today in a similar vein:

“By showing respect for the history of other cultures and religions, it (the Church) can recover the riches of other cultures so often suppressed by Western colonialism and imperialism and to use them to deepen its own understanding and practice of the gospel” p.195

“The specifically Christian ethos can only be credibly presented within the framework of a human or global ethic that represents the common moral standards and attitudes of the different religions and philosophies; it can never stand in contradiction to true human values....Put in other terms, the Church should concentrate on formulating objectives rather than pronouncing partisan political prescriptions; it should concentrate in outlining basic legitimate options rather than dealing out specific moral recipes, and it should aim at offering orientation for a better future, rather than attempting to endorse the ‘status quo’ or insist on returning to a ‘status quo ante’.” pp.257-8

A Servant Church?

So is a ‘Servant Church’ really possible as we have contended throughout these deliberations? Our writers conclude their thoughts in ways that are remarkably similar to each other:

Karl Rahner

“Even now we are going towards a future of the Church that is still hidden from us ...The gospel warning against taking too much thought for the morrow therefore holds also at the present time. But for what can be foreseen we should still prepare at the opportune time and not simply go on as before and wait like a mouse, hypnotized by the serpent of the future and doing nothing to save itself. Even if we equip ourselves for what can be foreseen of the future, enough remains that is incalculable and can only be awaited in hope and patience. pp.45-6

Hans Kung

Kung says that a reform of the Curia is essential if the Church is to be as it is meant to be. This involves the renunciation of titles, honorific addresses, opulence, pomp. *“There is little justification for papal legions of honour or Roman court titles in a Church committed to serving others.” P.266.* He goes back to the medieval period in search of what a ‘servant’ Church could be and identifies it in the person of St. Francis, the choice of whose name for our new pontiff is, in his estimation, no accident:

“Francis of Assisi represented the alternative to the Roman system. And even today his basic Christian concerns remain questions for the Catholic Church in general and in particular for a pope who has called himself Francis, explicitly linking this to the man from Assisi: “the man of the poor. The man of peace. The man who loved and cared for creation-and in this moment we don’t have such a great relationship with the creator. The man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man who wanted a poor Church” (Pope Francis, 16 March 2013)

Poverty A Church in the spirit of Innocent III means a Church of wealth, pomp, circumstance, acquisitiveness and financial scandal. In contrast, a Church in the spirit of Francis means a Church of transparent financial policies and modest frugality; a Church which concerns itself above all with those who are poor, weak, and marginalized; a Church which does not pile up wealth and capital but instead actively fights poverty and which offers its staff exemplary conditions of employment.

Humility A Church in the spirit of Pope Innocent means a Church of power and domination, bureaucracy and discrimination, repression and Inquisition. In contrast a Church in the spirit of Francis means a Church of humanity, dialogue, brother and sisterhood, and hospitality for those who do not conform to prevailing norms ;it means unpretentious service of its leaders and social solidarity, a community which does not exclude new religious forces and ideas from the Church but rather allows them to flourish

Simplicity A Church in the spirit of Pope Innocent means a Church of dogmatic immovability, moralistic censure and legal hedging, a Church where everything is regulated by canon law, a Church of all-knowing scholasticism and of fear. In contrast, a Church in the spirit of Francis of Assisi means a Church of Good News and of joy, a theology based purely on the gospel, a Church which listens to people instead of indoctrinating them from on high, a Church that does not only teach, but constantly learns anew. P.337

Can we save the Church? As long as we continue to believe that this is truly the Church of Christ in which the Spirit of God continues to work despite all human failings and obstacles, there is no reason to doubt that we can and will save it and that the Church

will not only survive its present mortal crisis but that, sooner or later, we will once again become what Christ intended us to be.p.338

Jean Vanier

“What can be done to help people accept and love each other? That is today’s major challenge! “ p.101

“What are most people really seeking? It is joy, and joy is what is so terribly missing. It is buried under the understandable preoccupation with staying in work and holding together the fragments of life. But it is tarnished even more by the frustrations built up by the images of an unattainable consumer culture which dominate commercial centres, television and the internet. There is not joy in any of this yet it is joy for which most people thirst. Joy springs up when people work together for unity and peace. p.103

Even in our time, it is still joy which attracts us. Jesus says, ‘I give you my joy so that your joy may become complete.’ The new evangelisation, it seems to me, doesn’t consist only in seeking personal conversion through announcing Jesus; it must invite people to enter into a community where people love each other. This means offering places where people celebrate together and experience a feeling of belonging. Joy comes from this sense of belonging to a community, of feeling good together despite our differences, of feeling that we are no longer alone with our problems and our griefs. p.105

“There is a danger in the sense of isolation which is so widespread today: the growth of sectarian movements is also a response to the huge need for belonging. A sect is a community which is closed in around the figure of a guru and built on fear. People join because they are afraid – of loneliness, of feeling lost, of going to hell – and they stay there for the same reasons, for fear of the consequences if they leave. These groups are shut off behind concrete walls. A healthy community must be open and help each of its members to grow in a real inner freedom. Hospitality is vital for any Christian community, because it teaches us to welcome each person as they are, humbly and with respect.” p.106

“At the heart of society’s ills is a call to create more community. And Christians are surely invited to dare take the initiatives which will shine a new love into our troubled world.” p.112

“At the end of this book, I dare to suggest that the mystery to which we are all called is to live like Jesus, who became small and weak. He is hidden in those who are humiliated, in the poorest the foolish and the weak of our societies, all those whom God has chosen to confound the intellectual and the powerful of the earth – and so, it has to be said, of the Church itself.” p.145

Session 7 And so....

Here are some of the comments and questions from the participants in the course:

- What exactly do we understand by the term, “The Servant Church”? We need to have an idea of this before we can act upon it. We need to think who and what are we serving – eg. ourselves, friends, relatives, parishioners, local communities, others, those we don’t know who need help (Is this help to be prayer, money, encouragement, and our time or effort?)
- It cannot be ignored that few people now live in a close-knit community which is also their parish. Geographically parishioners and their families are spread far and wide. This creates a much more complex society, but it must be recognised that parishioners may well be serving others away from their own church – in their homes and local environments, travelling to visit friends and families, etc. Perhaps people don’t feel able to give any more time than their necessarily busy lives dictate, though they are still readily serving and this must be acknowledged.
- Of those who are left, there will be some who choose not to partake in any “servant Church” activities and others who are willing and able to commit but not so as to detract from other focuses. Whilst some may be happy to be obvious in their support others will want to be in the background.
- I feel that the positives in our lives should be stressed with regard to serving – that parishioners should be encouraged to assess just how much they are already active members of the Servant Church in their everyday lives – and then determine for themselves if or what they can do to ‘step up’ their role.
- I feel we shall all understand that anything we do is through love and not guilt!!
- Perhaps we need to get away from notions of ‘activities’ or feeling it involves doing something. The “Servant Church” should be who we are, and we should try to bring out the idea that we are all part of it, ie. the Church of Christ who came to serve and not to be served.
- It should involve the whole of us and flow from our baptism as our attitude to life.
- Maybe we need to evaluate what are thinking inside rather than doing what we are told. There must be more than the feeling that by coming to church we are ‘doing our bit’
- Some people’s lives are complicated; it is not always easy to stand back and think of a new beginning

- So much may be determined elsewhere, on an international level so perhaps we don't have the mean to shape our future.
- But isn't Pope Francis inviting us to do precisely this in his desire to share responsibilities with his bishops and recognise that pastoral problems and solutions may be different in different places?
- How would de-centralisation look and how might it affect us?

The "Servant Church" is not an action plan but exists and can only exist in the minds of those who are truly followers of him who came to serve and thereby redeemed the world. It is not necessarily about 'doing things' at all, especially when we have convinced ourselves that we are 'doing enough' already and don't have the time or the energy to do any more! More to the point, our own 'assessment' of who we are and what we do can too often be determined by our own values and standards rather than by the union with Our Lord. So what does it take to be a 'servant'? What would make anyone want to 'serve' another person? As we said at the very beginning of this course, to 'serve' does not mean to be 'subservient', namely to subjugate yourself to the will and whim of another. The only reason you might want to serve someone else is that impact they have had on you, the respect and love they have engendered in you. Often this springs from a sense of appreciation of what they have done and are doing for you. As St. Augustine once said: 'he who has loved me, has made me lovable'. We will only be a servant Church when we have discovered once again or maybe even for the very first time, the person of our Saviour precisely as our Saviour and Lord, as Bishop Malcolm pointed out so graphically to the people of Liverpool recently, and found within ourselves a desire to love and honour him. This is not dependent on the teachings of popes and bishops, but comes from the heart and soul of each individual who lives in community with others who are of a similar mind and heart depending on their personal and social circumstances and who are willing to place themselves as the 'disposal' of this Lord without fear.

At the beginning of "the Joy of the Gospel", Pope Francis says: *"Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades."* (para 2) *"I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them...The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk"* (para.3) Again you will recognise strong similarities between this and Bishop Malcolm's Liverpool homily. The Pope continues thus: *"Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being."* (para.8) *"Whenever we make the effort to*

return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world.” (para.11)

So where is this ‘Servant Church’ and how can we bring it to be? It is all of us, the community of believers and the answer is right here in front of us: to think with the mind of Christ as we heard in the first reading today, see with the eyes of Christ, speak with the words of Christ, serve with the hands of Christ, love with the heart of Christ and live with the life of Christ. But we cannot make ourselves do this – we need help, as Fr.Kung points out at the evening of his remarkable career: *“So...Can we save the Catholic Church? Yes we can, but only if the Spirit of Jesus Christ moves our whole community of faith anew and endows the leadership of the Church with new credibility, understanding and acceptance. That, in turn, depends on those of us who together constitute this community of believers and who are open to the breath of the Holy Spirit, which moves where and as it wills.” p.65*

It all comes down to each and every one of us, from pope to pauper, rich to poor, man and woman, and our willingness to be as she, the mother of the Church, in complete contradiction to all the world we live in now claims as vital and necessary for our salvation: “I am the servant of the Lord; let what you have said, be done to me”. We sing these words so often, maybe even without noticing. We pray it every day, often without meaning what we say, but now we seek his power and his mercy as we embark on this so exciting project of life together: “So let us learn how to serve, and in our lives enthrone him. Each other’s needs to prefer, for it is Christ we’re serving. This is our God, the servant king. He calls us now to follow him; to bring our lives as a daily offering, or worship to the servant king.”

In ‘returning to the source’ as the Pope says, we wait on the Lord in our prayer and see what he asks of us and wishes to do through us, so don’t be surprised!

Thanks be to God

June 15 2014

Appendix 1 – Homily for October 13/14 2013 – Fr. Frank Daly

Last week we spoke of how society and the Church had lost sight of God and lost sight of love. People have simply abandoned him if indeed they ever had a real life with him in the first place. In a world that is preoccupied with ‘me’ we have rejected the ‘you’, whether that is another person or Our Lord. We see him as we see them as a means of pleasing us and doing what we want. We spoke about the process of love and how it grows and affects people at different stages and in order to rediscover what loving the Lord is like, we needed to rediscover what love really means. Thus in identifying the different stages in the process of ‘falling in love’ we can see how these are mirrored in the process of coming to love the Lord as well, as identified in the New Testament:

a) Stage 1 – you ‘hear’ about someone from someone else, are intrigued and interested in that person even before you have met them. You are anxious to meet them and see what they are really like. Look at the story of Zacchaeus in St. Luke. He was “anxious to see what sort of man Jesus was”, and then note what happened after their ‘encounter’ – complete transformation.: “if I have cheated anyone I will pay them back ten times over”

b) Stage 2 - seeking out opportunities to be with them – “the tax collectors and sinners were seeking the company of Jesus” – would you and I do that in our prayer, ie. look for ways of being with the Lord?

c) Stage 3 - you find yourself doing things to make life better for them – cf. Martha and Mary, who looked after Jesus and offered him the hospitality of their home and their hearts. Do we try to make life better for the Lord by living in his way and not our own or do we cause him sadness by refusing to do so?

d) Stage 4 - once a friendship has been established and you have become fond of each other, you then find yourself ‘stealing away’ to be with that person – ‘Jesus took his disciples off to a lonely place where they could be by themselves.’ Would we make an excuse to get away from the crowd and what they are doing to ‘go to our private room’ and be with him?

e) Stage 5 – intimacy, which is the goal of a relationship where two people surrender themselves to each other completely in an act of self-less giving and love. – cf. Paul’s writings: ‘I long to be gone and be with Christ; for me to live is Christ’ – is our relationship with him like that? Do we thirst and pine for him like the psalmist – ‘O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting; my body pines for you like a dry weary land without water’ (Ps. 138) - or St. Augustine’s great prayer? – ‘I have tasted you and now burn for your peace’

f) Stage 6 – recognising yourself as you really are because of the love of the ‘other’ person, and asking yourself, how could this person possibly love me? – cf. Jesus encounters with Matthew, Magdalen and Peter – “leave me Lord, I am a sinful man”.

And yet as Augustine said – “quia amavit me fecisti me amabilem” – ‘he who has loved me has made me lovable.’

g) Stage 7 - reaching out in love. For people who love each other, they cannot keep that love to themselves. It necessarily overflows into a new life which is a child, but also in generous hospitality to care for those in need. cf. Acts of the Apostles and the behaviour of the early believers who, ‘sold their possessions and lived in common’ – would we give away all that we have for the Lord? Many people have and still do.

We can only love him when we realise how much he has loved us and have truly encountered him in prayer not as the solution to our problems but as our God. Every time we come into a church we see how much he loved us – as soon as we look at the crucifix. Jesus is saying: see how much I love you; will you love me too? Pope Francis said recently that in his prayer he asks himself: what have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ and what should I do for Christ? You can’t know Jesus, he says, without getting involved with him, without betting your life on him. If you don’t pray; if you don’t talk with Jesus, then you don’t know him.

What has happened to us as a society and as a church is very simple: we have lost any notion of service and giving away your life to and for another person. More than this we know that ‘myths’ are created to justify ourselves like the young man in the gospel, who was ‘anxious to justify himself’ – “you don’t need to go to Church to be a Christian” – yes you do, because that is what Jesus asked, and you do it because you love him, you want to be with him and receive him. Would you ever refuse an invitation to share a meal with a friend? “You don’t need to go to confession to be forgiven by God” – yes you do, because in reconciliation, Jesus is patiently waiting for us to show us his love and his understanding, and you cannot forgive yourself. Our problem is that we have avoided this sacrament because we are embarrassed by our own failure, don’t want to face up to it and don’t even see or feel the need to be forgiven.

This Catholic Church is slowly fading away; let us not be under any illusions about that. Despite the wonderful Pope we have and all the leadership and inspiration he is giving us, people are drifting away from the Lord. Look at the benches of this church here if you don’t believe me. This is a critical moment for us, a time to think about our present and our future, a time to look again at our lives and to see what is missing. We have lost sight of the Lord; we have stopped loving the Lord. Isn’t that such a pity and wouldn’t it be so wonderful if we could rediscover a life with him and not be afraid to face up to ourselves, face up to those who might belittle or criticise us, and accept Jesus as our Saviour once again? A life full of challenge, excitement, love and delight awaits us; why do we keep settling for the stifling introspection of self-seeking, self-opinion and the most crushing banality imaginable. A person life of discipleship with Christ is on offer – why do we turn away from him and why can we not turn back to him? Is he so unworthy of our love, who himself has given his life for us? In the words of an old hymn which we sing so often: “could I dare live and not requite, such love then death were meet reward. I cannot live unless to prove some love for such unmeasured love”

Appendix 2 – From the script of “Mother Mary”

“Mother Mary” was written in 2010-2013 not simply as a way of telling the Christmas story through the songs of ABBA. It was a serious attempt to depict what has happened to our celebration of the feast of Christmas, and thereby what has actually happened to us as persons in our modern world. The development of expectation, pampering, self-indulgence has only served to make people depressed and overwhelmed with the banality of it all. The answer proposed in the musical was to return to the beginning to find the true story and then live it.

A man and a woman enter with a supermarket trolley and long list

Woman : Once again it’s Christmas time, why do we feel depressed?
 People rushing everywhere, as if they are possessed.
 We’ve lost the plot and meaning now, so all that’s left is us;
 for what we want and what we need, we’re making such a fuss.
 the rows, and fights and fallings out, to change this is a must

Man : Supermarket trolleys crammed with food, we’ll surely waste;
 people living far and near who’d dearly love a taste
 of what we daily throw away; neglected in their need,
 how much could we help them if we only curbed our greed?
 selfishness consumes us so we cannot hear them plead

Both: The treadmill of consumerism makes you want to shout;
 everything you have to buy so no one goes without.
 But what of those who’ve nothing do we think or even care?
 Can’t we see that what we have we’re really meant to share?
 Will we never change our lives it’s really so unfair?

 Does it have to be this way, can nothing yet be done?
 Is anything still left before all happiness is gone?

The dancers run onto the stage during the introduction and each carry a large Christmas stocking

Chorus: Christmas Eve and we’ve hung up our stockings,
 Hoping for lots of presents once again for this as every year;
 Face-book, I-pods are all on our wish-lists
 Lots of other things too, but among them we detect a hidden fear
 Is this the only way to spend Christmas day?

 Gimme, gimme, gimme the reason for Christmas,
 Won’t somebody show me how it really should be?
 Take me, take me, take me, back to the beginning,
 Back to the beginning so the truth I can see.

Too much food, drink and plain self-indulgence
Over-fed, bored and moody,
Is the way that we spend all Christmas Day
Other people have nothing to eat,
They'd be glad of what we have
What we waste and what we throw away
Blinded by our own greed, we can't see those in need

Gimme, gimme, gimme the reason for Christmas,
Won't somebody show me how it really should be?
Take me, take me, take me, back to the beginning,
Back to the beginning so the truth I can see.

The man and woman enter and take centre stage

Woman : We feel so empty now, and somehow far away;
the truth be told it's years since we've loved Christmas Day.
We're going through the motions now smiling for other's sake,
but all the time we fear, that when it's here, we'll break.

Chorus: So every day we pray dear God, please stay and save our souls;
the pain that lies inside no longer hide so save our souls.
Take away all our greed and our need, we implore;
what we lack get us back on your track, faith restored.

Man : Can it be different yet or is it just too late?
Are we to be condemned to this, an endless fate?
And will we lose everything, our sanity and peace;
is there an act of will to make it still a feast?

Chorus: So every day we pray dear God, please stay and save our souls;
the pain that lies inside no longer hide so save our souls.
Make us new, just for you lift us up from the floor;
Help us find, in our mind, Jesus Christ as our Lord

Appendix 3 – “Church Going” by Philip Larkin (1955)

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside letting the door thud shut.
Another church, matting, seats and stone,
And little books, sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence.

Move forward, run my hand around the font
From where I stand the roof looks almost new –
Cleaned or restored? Someone would know; I don't.
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses and pronounce,
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did. In fact I often do,
And always end at much a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for, wondering, too
When churches will fall completely out of use.
What shall we turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show
Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone,
Pick simples for a cancer, or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random,
But superstition, like belief, must die
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky.

A shape less recognisable each week,
A purpose more obscure, I wonder who
Will be the last, the very last to seek
This place for what it was, one of the crew
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrhh?
Or will he be my representative?

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspoilt
So long and equably what since is found,
Only in separation – marriage and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these – for which was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsy barn is worth
It pleases me to stand in silence here.

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised and robed as destinies,
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

Appendix 4 – excerpts from: “For the Time Being” by W.H.Auden (1942)

Well, so that is that. Now we must dismantle the tree,
Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes –
Some have got broken – and carrying them up to the attic.
The holly and the mistletoe must be taken down and burnt,
And the children got ready for school. There are enough
Left-overs to do, warmed up for the rest of the week –
Not that we have much appetite, having drunk such a lot,
Stayed up so late, attempted – quite unsuccessfully –
To love all of our relatives, and in general
Grossly overestimated our powers. Once again
As in previous years we have seen the actual Vision and failed
To do more than entertain it as an agreeable
Possibility, once again we have sent Him away,
Begging though to remain His obedient servant,
The promising child who cannot keep His word for long.
The Christmas Feast is already a fading memory,
And already the mind begins to be vaguely aware
Of an unpleasant whiff of apprehension at the thought
Of Lent and Good Friday which cannot, after all, now
Be very far off. But, for the time being, here we all are,
Back in the moderate Aristotelian city
Of darning and the Eight-Fifteen, where Euclid’s geometry
And Newton’s mechanics would account for our experience,
And the kitchen table exists because I scrub it.
It seems to have shrunk during the holidays. The streets
Are much narrower than we remembered; we had forgotten
The office was as depressing as this. To those who have seen
The Child, however dimly, however incredulously,
The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all.
For the innocent children who whispered so excitedly
Outside the locked door where they knew the presents to be
Grew up when it opened. Now, recollecting that moment
We can repress the joy, but the guilt remains unconscious;
Remembering the stable where once in our lives
Everything became a You and nothing was an It.
And craving the sensation, but ignoring the cause,
We look round for something, no matter what, to inhibit
Our self-reflection, and the obvious thing for that purpose
Would be some great suffering. So, once we have met the Son,

We are tempted ever after to pray to the Father;
“Lead us into temptation and evil for our sake.”
They will come, all right, don’t worry; very probably in a form
That we do not expect, and certainly with a force
More dreadful than we can imagine. In the meantime
There are bills to be paid, machines to keep in repair,
Irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem
From insignificance. The happy morning is over,
The night of agony still to come; the time is noon;
When the Spirit must practice his scales of rejoicing
Without even a hostile audience, and the Soul endure
A silence that is neither for or against her faith
That God’s Will be done. That, in spite of her prayers,
God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph.

He is the Way,
Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness;
You will see rare beasts and have unique adventures.

He is the Truth.
Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;
You will come to a great city that has expected your return for years.

He is the Life.
Love Him in the World of the Flesh;
And at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.

Auden’s is a Christmas that can glimpse redemption even in the trivialization of Christmas, in the frantic shopping, distracted gaiety and unsuccessful attempts, as he says, to love all our relatives. This is a Christmas for the day after Christmas. This is a Christmas for grown-ups...His concern in the poem is not simply to speak of the Nativity events but rather to draw out their incarnational impact upon the mundane world of the everyday. And what could be more boring, more deadeningly mundane, than the cabin-fever periods of February? Only a late-winter reading allows access to deeper layers of meaning in the poem, because for Auden, Christmas is...an annual reminder that God has acted and is acting to ‘redeem from insignificance’ the monotonous sludge of our everyday routines.

Appendix 5 – “True and Sincere” – one priest’s response to abuse

The sins of our brothers make us think that others
believe that we’re all just the same.
The crimes of a few, what they cruelly do
mean the rest of us carry the shame

Chorus: And how we’d have loved little ones of our own,
to cherish to comfort, to cheer.
Taken up in our arms, they’d be safe from all harm,
‘cos this father’s love’s true and sincere.

In the first place ‘twas love as a gift from above
that made us give up all our lives.
As the years have gone by though, we realise with a sigh now,
precisely of what we’re deprived

Our emotions lie hidden; it’s as if we’re forbidden
to show what we really feel;
Though they all call us ‘father’, they’re time we’d much rather
have children ourselves for real. (Chorus)

In suspicion a finger can point if they linger
a second too long in our arms;
As they run to embrace us, we can see in their faces,
a picture of innocent charm.

They jump up on your knee, pull your hair, squeal with glee
and sometimes it’s a bit of a bind,
but to hurt or abuse them, for our pleasure to use them,
such a thought never enters our minds. (Chorus)

For God’s sake we’re priests, though some act like beasts
in taking their childhood away;
Can it be detrimental, in being ‘parental’
to love them in a different way.

Little friends we’re your ministers, there’s nothing sinister
in our care and affection for you.
When e’er you draw near, you have nothing to fear,
‘cos our love is sincere as it’s true (Chorus)

Frank Daly June 2007

Appendix 6 - “Those Christians....” - An extract from anonymous letter to ‘Diognetus’ possibly dating from the second century.

“For Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language or customs; you see they do not live in cities of their own, or speak some strange dialect, or have some peculiar lifestyle. This teaching of theirs has not been contrived by the invention and speculation of inquisitive men; nor are they propagating mere human teaching as some people do. They live in both Greek and foreign cities, wherever chance has put them. They follow local customs in clothing, food and the other aspects of life. But at the same time they demonstrate to us the wonderful and certainly unusual form of their own citizenship. They live in their own native lands, but as aliens; as citizens they share all things with others; but like aliens, suffer all things. Every foreign country is to them as their native country, and every native land as a foreign country. They marry and have children just like everyone else; but they do not kill unwanted babies. They offer a shared table but not a shared bed. They are at present ‘in the flesh’ but they do not live ‘according to the flesh’. They are passing their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the appointed laws, and go beyond the laws in their own lives. They love everyone but are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and gain life. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of all things. They are dishonoured and yet gain glory through dishonour. Their names are blackened and yet they are cleared. They are mocked and bless in return. They are treated outrageously and behave respectfully to others. When they do good, they are punished as evil-doers; when punished they rejoice as if being given new life. They are attacked by Jews as aliens and are persecuted by Greeks; yet those who hate them cannot give any reason for their hostility. To put it simply – the soul is to the body as Christians are to the world. The soul is spread through all parts of the body and Christians through all the cities of the world. The soul is in the body but it is not the body. Christians are in the world but not of the world.”

Appendix 7 – The “Rule of Faith” of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons

The faith...in one God, the Father Almighty, who made the heavens and earth and the seas and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, who made known through the prophets the plan of salvation and the coming, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus our Lord, and his future appearing from heaven in the glory of the Father to sum up all things and to raise up anew the flesh of the whole human race. Creeds in statement form developed from the third century by means of a question-answer procedure which was followed in the sacrament of baptism but the creed of Nicaea inaugurated a new era: the old creeds were for converts, the new ones for bishops.

Appendix 8 Heresies

During the course, we have made reference to several ‘heresies’ that were present at the time of the early Church. Here is a list of a few of them for reference:

Gnosticism – a variety of religious movements in the early Christian centuries which stressed that people could be saved through a secret knowledge (‘gnosis’ in Greek), which came to be seen as heretical perversions of Christianity. The material creation was seen as evil, and believers escaped from the prison of their bodies at death and pass through the planetary regions controlled by hostile demons to be reunited with God. Since they believed that salvation depended solely on the knowledge of one’s ‘spiritual’ nature, some Gnostics indulged in extremely licentious behaviour. Many of them claimed that Christ only appeared to be human, like a phantom and that it was not possible that a transcendent God could be involved in the material world. Some of these people were known as **Docetists**. The most important anti-Gnostic writer was Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons. He wrote that Jesus Christ was of the race of David, the child of Mary, who was truly born, ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died.

Manichaeism – the teaching that there were two eternal principles: light and darkness, God and matter, and Jesus came to release souls of light from the prison of their bodies.

Sabellianism – God exists in different ‘modes’ or ‘faces’ but only in one mode at any one time, and his names – Father, Son and Spirit – described the different roles he played at different times.

Donatism – The Donatists were a protest movement standing for a holy church, purity of discipline and unflinching defiance of godless rulers. They were named after Donatus, their bishop of Carthage from 313-355. They believed that they constituted the true church, and that Catholics were apostate. They were the dominant church in North Africa, supporting local revolts against Roman rule and suffering when they were put down, and survived in various forms until the 7th century.

Monophysitism – the teaching originating from the early to mid-5th century in Constantinople that Christ’s humanity was absorbed by his divinity like a drop of wine into the sea into one ‘nature’ or ‘monophysis’, which divided the East and West in terms of their thinking about Christology – who Jesus Christ really is, and which was rejected by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Appendix 9

The Conversion of St. Augustine (from "Confessions")

"I probed the hidden depths of my soul and wrung its pitiful secrets from it, and when I gathered them all before the eyes of my heart, a great storm broke within me, bringing with it a great deluge of tears... For I felt that I was still enslaved by my sins and in my misery, I kept crying, 'how long shall I go on saying, tomorrow, tomorrow? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?' I was asking myself these questions, weeping all the while with the most bitter sorrow in my heart, when all at once, I heard the singing voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the chorus, 'take it and read, take it and read.' At this, I looked up thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which children used to chant words like these, but I could not remember ever hearing them before. I stemmed my flow of tears and stood up, telling myself that this could only be God's command to open my book of scripture and read the first passage on which my eye should fall. For I had heard the story of Antony and I remembered how he had happened to go into a church while the gospel was being read and had taken it as an instruction addressed to himself when he heard the words, 'Go home and sell all that belongs to you. Give it to the poor and so the treasure you have shall be in heaven; then come back and follow me.' By this message from God he had at once been converted. So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting, for when I stood up to move away, I had put down the book containing Paul's letters. I seized it and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: 'no orgies or drunkenness, no immorality or indecency, no fighting or jealousy. Take up the weapons of the Lord Jesus Christ and stop giving attention to your sinful nature, to satisfy its desires.' I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of faith flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled."

"Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty? How magnificent is his strength! How inscrutable his wisdom! Man is one of your creatures, Lord, and his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the mark of death, the sign of his own sin, to remind him that you thwart the proud. But still, since he is part of your creation, he wishes to praise you. The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself, and our hearts find no place until they rest in you."

"Late have I loved you, o beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved you. For behold you were within me and I outside; I sought you outside and in my ugliness fell upon those things that you have made. You were with me and I was not with you. I was kept from you by those things, yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all. You called and cried to me and broke open my deafness; you sent forth your beams and shone upon me and chased away my blindness; you breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for you; I tasted you and now hunger and thirst for you; you touched me and I have burned for your peace."

Appendix 10 St. Patrick's Breastplate

I bind unto myself today,
the strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
the Three in One and One in Three.
I bind this day to me for ever,
by power of faith, Christ's incarnation,
His baptism in the Jordan River,
his death on the Cross for my salvation.
His bursting from the spiced tomb,
his riding up the heavenly way,
His coming at the day of doom,
I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself today,
the power of God to hold and lead:
His eye to watch, his might to stay,
his ear to hearken to my need;
The wisdom of my God to teach,
his hand to guide, his shield to ward;
The Word of God to give me speech,
his heavenly host to be my guard.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself today,
the strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
the Three in One and One in Three.
Of whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word;
Praise to the God of my salvation
Salvation is of Christ the Lord. Amen

Appendix 11 St. Francis of Assisi

As our new pope has taken the name of this saint, it is important for us to know something about him and what his inspiration may come to offer to the Church through the ministry of Pope Francis. He was born in 1182, the son of a wealthy Italian cloth merchant and a popular youth who led a carefree life. He was converted through illness, a pilgrimage to Rome, a vision and the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:7-10: “As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with a few coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the workman deserves his keep.” His father was angry because Francis interpreted the gospel to mean that goods should be freely give to the poor. Leaving home in a ragged cloak and rope-belt taken from a scarecrow, he wandered the countryside with a few followers, begging from the rich and giving to the poor and preaching. His charm, humility and kindly manner attracted many followers. In 1210 he obtained approval from Pope Innocent III for his simple rule devoted to apostolic poverty and began to call his associates ‘Friars Minor’. The rule was strict charging its adherents to ‘observe the holy gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, without personal belongings and in chastity...’ “I advise, warn and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ that when they go into the world, they shall not quarrel nor contend with words, nor judge each other. But let them be gentle, peaceable, modest, merciful and humble...” Does this ring any bells?

A similar society for women began two years later when Chiara Favorone (St. Clare) was converted and commissioned. Francis travelled in the Middle East to encourage missionary activities but was largely thwarted, and returned to his order which had experienced many problems in his absence. He laid down his leadership and retired to a hermitage on Monte Alvernia, where he allegedly received the stigmata (bodily representations of the wounds of Christ). In spite of illness, pain and blindness, he composed his ‘Canticle of the Sun’ before submitting gladly to ‘brother death’ in 1226.

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
not so much to be understood as to understand; not so much to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in
dying that we are born to eternal life.

*Appendix 12 The hymns of St. Thomas Aquinas (translated into English
by Edward Caswall in the 19th century)*

Therefore we, before him bending, this great sacrament revere;
types and shadows have their ending, for the newer rite is here.
Faith our outward sense befriending, makes the inward vision clear.
Glory let us give and blessing to the Father and the Son, honour, might and praise
addressing while eternal ages run; ever too his love confessing,
who from both with both is one.

O Godhead hid, devoutly I adore thee, who truly art within the forms below me;
to thee my heart I bow with bended knee, as failing quite in contemplating thee.
Sight, touch and taste in thee are each deceived, the ear alone most safely is believed:
I believe all the Son of God has spoken, than truth's own word there is no truer token.
God only on the cross lay hid from view; but here lies hid at once the manhood too;
and I, in both professing my belief, make the same prayer as the repentant thief.
Thy wounds as Thomas saw, I do not see; yet thee confess my Lord and God to be;
make me believe thee ever more and more, in thee my hope, in thee my love to store.
O thou memorial of our Lord's own dying, O bread that living art and vivifying.
Make ever thou my soul on thee to live; ever a taste of heavenly sweetness give.
Jesus, who for the present veiled I see, what I so thirst for, oh, vouchsafe to me; that I
may see they countenance unfolding, and may be blest they glory in beholding.

Alternative translation by Gerald Manley Hopkins (also 19th century)

Godhead here in hiding whom I do adore, masked by these bare shadows, shape and
nothing more;
see Lord at the service low lies here a heart, lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.
Seeing, touching tasting are in they deceived; how says trusty hearing that shall be
believed? What God's son hath told me, take for truth I do; truth himself speaks truly, or
there's nothing true.
On the cross they Godhead, made no sign to men; here thy very manhood steals from
human ken; both are my confession, both are my belief; and I pray the prayer of the
dying thief.
I am not like Thomas, wounds I cannot see, but can plainly call thee Lord and God as he;
this faith each day deeper be my holding of, daily make me harder hope and dearer love.
O thou our reminder of Christ crucified, living bread the life of us for whom he died;
lend this life to me, then; feed and feast my mind, there be thou the sweetness man was
meant to find.
Jesus who I look at shrouded here below, I beseech thee, send me what I long for so;
some day to gaze on thee face to face in light, and be blest for ever with thy glory's sight.

Appendix 13 **Homily of Archbishop Malcolm McMahon OP**
(At his installation Mass as Archbishop of Liverpool, Thursday 1st May 2014)

I chose to be installed as Archbishop of Liverpool on the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker because Joseph teaches us that we are part of God's creative plan for the world, and that we are all called to work together to fulfil that plan. At the beginning of his pontificate, Saint John XXIII said: The secret of everything is to let yourself be carried by the Lord and to carry the Lord. That is a secret which Saint Joseph also understood. He was carried by the Lord in his acceptance of God's plan for him, and he literally carried the Lord as the guardian, teacher and guide of Jesus. There are three aspects to Joseph's life which help us to live our Catholic faith, to be carried by the Lord and carry the Lord, in the months and years ahead in this great Archdiocese which is placed under his patronage.

First of all, Joseph teaches us to dream. According to Saint Matthew's Gospel, when he found that Mary, his betrothed, was pregnant, he made up his mind to do the right thing by her; although espoused to her, he thought it would save her reputation if he were to break this promise quietly. However, in a dream, the Angel told him not to be afraid to take Mary home as his wife, because she was pregnant with the One to be called Jesus, the Saviour who would save his people from their sins. In doing this, the Angel encouraged Joseph to abandon the conventions of first century Palestine and marry Mary – which he did. It is thanks to his kindness, his obedience to the will of God, his being a 'man of honour' that, from the moment of his conception, Jesus could be loved, cared for and kept safe. This Jesus is my Saviour, our Saviour – my Lord, our Lord; how easily can we forget that? Our principal task as Christians is to make that message known, to make Jesus present in the world of today. To do this, we must be ready, like Joseph, to break with convention, and do things differently. Joseph teaches us that everything we say and do in our personal and family lives, our parishes and schools, our convents and chaplaincies, must have as its purpose and its end the proclamation of Jesus as Lord, for he is the source and the summit of our lives. Taking risks to proclaim the good news of salvation is the task before us as much here in the Archdiocese of Liverpool as elsewhere. Breaking with structures and conventions that give us comfort, that feed our complacency and dull our sensitivity to the demands of being a Christian, is what it means to be a missionary disciple.

This afternoon, I want all of us in the Archdiocese of Liverpool to make our own the words of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium":
"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples. All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized." The task of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ is for all of us. We are all called to carry the Lord and be carried by the Lord. The Archdiocese, in "Leaving Safe Harbours", has already begun the 'resolute process of discernment, purification and reform' which Pope Francis demands of each Diocese, but this cannot be left to others. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we must work together, as Bishop, priests and people, to continue to hand on the Deposit of Faith, to

build up the Body of Christ, to worship God in spirit and truth, and to serve our brothers and sisters. So let us dream together about how we can better proclaim Jesus as Lord in our own lives, in our parishes, and in our Diocese. And we are called to dream this dream joyfully, filled with the hope which the Risen Lord gives his Church, and never giving in to the temptation to misery or despair, even when it seems we are swimming against the tide. As Pope Francis reminds us: “One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses’. [Quite how they translated that into Latin is anyone’s guess!] Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents. While painfully aware of our own frailties, we have to march on without giving in, keeping in mind what the Lord said to Saint Paul: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’” So, our dreams invite us to share more deeply in the life of God himself.

Second, Joseph was a worker, a carpenter; the reason why Pius XII established the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker on 1st May, ‘Labour Day’ in many countries, was to demonstrate that God blesses and sanctifies the ordinary. Each and every person on this earth is born with an unalienable dignity which is rooted in our being made in God’s own image and likeness, as the Book of Genesis reminds us. But that dignity is a gift which has been given to us by God, and it is a gift to be realized, and the place where we realize it is work. As Saint John Paul II said in his Encyclical Letter “*Laborem exercens*”, ‘work is a fundamental dimension of our existence on earth’. Work is a good thing for us – a good thing for our humanity – because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more a human being’. Just as the people of Israel were freed from slavery and made a nation by their experience in Egypt, as a result of his second and third dreams Joseph, by his response and actions in protecting Jesus and Mary, shows that we too will be made free and become a nation, the new People of God. That is a special dignity given at our creation, lost by our sins and restored by Jesus. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, brothers and sisters of Jesus, children of the Most High – it is a dignity that is given to us by God. But it is by work that we discover it and deepen our awareness of it. As we care for the world around us, develop earth’s resources for the good of mankind, feed our families and ourselves, we truly realize our identity as being loving, and loveable, children of God. In a changing society we must not lose this insight. Finding fulfilment for our God-given gifts of creativity and service, not giving in to pastimes and leisure activities, chasing the false gods of materialism and self-satisfaction, but being mindful of the obligations of social justice, is a challenge that faces the whole of society and not just the Church.

Third, Joseph was a family man. We all belong to different families, beginning with our parents, and as we go through life we gain, and lose, relatives and friends. We can see that in today’s Mass. You are all here today because you are part of my family – and I am part of yours: my brothers and their families, my cousins and personal friends; my brethren from the Dominican order; my brother Bishops; representatives from the Diocese of Nottingham, where I have been blessed to have been Bishop for the last thirteen years; and finally my new family – the Bishops, priests, deacons, religious and laypeople who make up the Archdiocese of Liverpool, together with our friends from

other Churches and faith traditions, civic society, and all people of goodwill. God has endowed the people of Liverpool, Lancashire and the Isle of Man with many great gifts, not least constancy in our Catholic faith, a living heritage which should inspire us and challenge us. The Martyrs of Lancashire testify to their love of Jesus name' and their fidelity to the truth. Father Nugent, with his plea to 'save the child', and his extraordinary efforts to alleviate poverty, promote the welfare of children and establish prison chaplaincy, spoke to us of the need to serve our brothers and sisters, in particular the poor and the vulnerable. That mission has carried on over the years – people have been welcomed to this area from all over the world, and left Liverpool to travel and settle throughout the world. That search for truth continues in the Hillsborough inquest, as at long last a true picture of the causes of this terrible tragedy become clear and responsibility is taken for it. It is our hope and expectation that the inquest will uncover and explain the truth of what happened so that justice will be done for the 96 and for their families, whose dignity over these last 25 years has been an example to us all.

I am honoured and humbled to be standing here in this beautiful, iconic Cathedral dedicated to Christ our King as your new Bishop, and I hope that I will repay the trust which Pope Francis has placed in me by appointing me as your Bishop, and which now you are asked to place in me as we begin to work together to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. According to John XXIII: "The sublime work, holy and divine, which the [...] Bishops must do each in his own diocese, is to preach the Gospel and guide men [and women] to their eternal salvation, and all must take care not to let any other earthly business prevent or impede or disturb this primary task." My prayer today is that all of us, each and every one of us, will make the preaching of the Gospel our primary task. Just as the vocation to be holy, to be saints, is not for the chosen few but for the multitude for whom Christ shed his Blood, so too is the proclamation of Christ in the world in which we live. We proclaim it in our words, in the way in which we speak to and about one another; in our actions, in the way in which we treat other people and serve them; and in our worship, when we gather in the awesome presence of God to worship him in spirit and truth. So today's Feast, and this Mass, invite us to place our trust more firmly in Jesus our Saviour; we are asked to dream his dreams, to do his work and to be his family. To be a Christian is a real challenge in the world in which we live, but it is a joyful, hope-filled and life-giving challenge for which we are prepared by Christ, who gives us the grace of the sacraments to give our lives in his service to the greater glory of God. Together let us accept that challenge, and promise Christ, whoever we are, that we will be carried by him, and carry him, in every moment and aspect of our lives. Amen.

Basil Loftus comments:

"The homily preached by Malcolm McMahon at his recent dedication as Archbishop of Liverpool should rank alongside Newman's "Second Spring" at the restoration of the English and Welsh hierarchy in 1850. It is a clarion call for evangelism. So far, in Liverpool, as in many other dioceses, 'doing things differently' has meant re-structuring parishes and pastoral areas, re-assigning clergy, re-calculating demographic projections, and performing actuarial aerobatics. Most of this is undoubtedly necessary, but it does not go to the heart of 'breaking with convention'; it does not equip today's

'missionary disciples' for their task. You can put chess pieces on a draughts-board, but you still have to learn to play chess...The new evangelisation that McMahon and Holy Father Francis call for, itself calls for a new mindset, a new understanding of the Church which we are called upon to take to others.' (Catholic Times, May 18 2014)