

ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW



GONZAGA LECTURE BY CARDINAL THOMAS J. WINNING ST. ALOYSIUS, GARNETHILL, GLASGOW

Although I have given much thought to tonight's subject over the past weeks and researched as much as my free time would allow me, I must confess I can't help feeling like Michelangelo as he contemplated his task of decorating the Sistine Chapel.

To plot the future of any institution is perilous. To foresee the dangers and areas of likely failure and success; to take every future issue that might affect it into account is a gigantic task.

But when that institution is the Catholic Church, a unique community of divine and human elements and a history of 2000 years, one has a canvas of immense proportions.

In the end I might not be satisfied with my contribution, but at least it may offer some points of reflection to you who will participate in the unfolding of the Catholic Church's mission in the 21st century.

A very salient point to keep before us when reflecting on the future is this. The future is not merely what has still to come as if detached from the present; a situation ahead out of our control which we must await as passive spectators.

Certainly the future will throw up the unexpected, the undesirable and the catastrophic, but on the whole the future of an institution like the Church is already being shaped by its current activities.

The future can be shaped by us.

The future is under construction now.

We can influence greatly the future of the Church.

We are engaged in an assessment of the Church in the next 100 or so years. We are not playing a game with a crystal ball; prophesying what will happen without backing our claims with good reasons.

What the Church is and does today will have a deep bearing on what it does tomorrow.

It is a community with a worldwide mission to promote the Gospel, the teaching of Jesus Christ whose objective is the eternal salvation of the whole human race.

What the Church has lived through in the 2000 years of her existence and especially in recent times, will have its effect on the Church in the making, just as the history, background and circumstances of you or me have an influence on how we act and who we are seen to be.

I suggest that we give some thought to the Church of yesterday and today, dream of the Church of the 21st century and try to discern how we get there.

The Church is very much part of the world whether she likes it or not. Because her membership is human beings she will have to bear the influences of the world in every age of its history.

There have been times when the Church was the dominant institution in that part of the world where she existed. At other times she has been influenced by the world to the detriment of her mission. There is a constant interaction between the Church and the world.

It began in the East, but found its centre in the West. Europe has been the foremost continent in the Christianisation of the world.

The missionary endeavours of the Church particularly over the past 500 years have seen great geographical advances. Indeed according to some writers the centre of gravity of Christendom has shifted to the Southern Hemisphere, Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania. Nowadays, around 70% of the world's Catholics are in that part of the world.

The consequences of this for the Church of today and tomorrow are immense and we will deal with these later.

However, this gigantic extension causes us to confront one great challenge on a worldwide scale, namely the issue of inculturation, which brings us to the nub of the Church's challenge vis-à-vis the world in which she has to live.

Although the Church may influence culture at certain times, she cannot choose the culture in which she has to live and her members are certainly influenced by the culture of their time and place.

This is such a crucial challenge for the Church in every age that we should reflect for a few moments on what exactly we mean.

The culture of a society is its way of life and guide to action passed on from one generation to the next. It comprises the implicit and explicit patterns of behaviour and the world of meaning and understanding in which people live out their lives in a significant manner. It is a way of thinking, feeling, believing, acting.

When examining the culture of a society we need to refer to its moral and normative aspects; its ethos. What are the prevailing norms, the things that society rewards, permits, celebrates, prizes, punishes?

The ethos of a society is implicit in its way of life, its values, its morality.

Culture also includes the world-view of that society; its interpretation of the world, its vision of reality, its concepts therefore of self, nature, life. The culture of a society should be able to answer the great questions every person wishes to pose: Where do we come from? Why are we here? What are we here for?

There should be a congruence or a cohesion between society's style of life (its ethos) and its view of reality (world-view). Such congruence gives meaning to lives.

In many societies this synthesis of ethos and worldview is brought about by religion. In the history of the world religion and religious belief have played a prominent part in the building up of a culture.

Today's culture is secular in most areas of the world. This is the Church's biggest challenge.

Paul VI in his post Synodal letter *Evangelii Nuntiandi* says that the challenge of culture is the most dramatic of our time. This situation did not happen overnight.

In the 16th and 17th centuries the Church suffered setbacks from which she has never fully recovered. The first was the reformation, the second came around the mid 17th century at the beginning of a period known ironically to us as the Enlightenment.

Until about 1650 western society shared a largely homogenous view of life, faith, tradition and authority.

Although by then the Church had become fragmented by the Reformation, the culture was still Christian.

By 1650 the whole idea of objective truth came first to be questioned and rejected. Everything, no matter how fundamental or deep-rooted, was up for debate.

Old certainties were replaced by new ones, often deriving from the new sciences. As a result a crippling secularism set in which was ultimately to banish belief in the supernatural from Europe's intellectual culture.

A kind of philosophical iconoclasm prevailed overthrowing everything and anything inherited from the past. Everything had to be based on reason: the foundations of the moral order were undermined. The Enlightenment was a revolution among society's elite, but it soon reached the masses and today underpins all of political and philosophical thought and modern culture.

The secular culture we live in is intensely powerful. The 4th Estate, the social communications media is its prisoner.

Modern political thought and the agenda for the future have as their mentors David Hume, Locke and the other fathers of the Enlightenment.

This age is not congenial to religious faith and that includes of course the Christian church. Over the last 30 years especially there has been a radical shift – perhaps a landslide would be nearer the mark – in our society's culture.

To believe in moral absolutes makes you today a sign of contradiction.

That is what the Catholic Church has become.

When you have principles of morality you are likely to be 'agin' most of what is happening in the country. When you have no moral principles you can do what you will – and you'll never be against anything. You go with the crowd.

Chesterton reminds us that dead things go with the tide. It takes a living thing to swim against the current.

When looking for the areas of shadow and light in the Church today it is essential to remember its *raison d'être*: salvation through closeness to God in this life: holiness.

The Church offers the means of holiness: the Word of God, the Sacraments, prayer, and holds up models of goodness in every age. She is a mixture of the divine and the human.

The Church over the last century has endured the longest and most severe anti-God persecution ever seen. As it moves into the 21st century the institution most persecuted, the Catholic Church alone survives while its persecutors in the forms they assumed have all burned out.

Communism, Nazism, Fascism, have all disappeared. The Church is still here. Don't forget the velvet revolution of 1989. Christians had a big part to play in what is sometimes described in terms of a miracle.

Persecution from now on is unlikely to be physical: the world will no longer stand by idly and watch people die of oppression.

No, the persecution of the Church in the future will be much more subtle: it will stem from religious indifference, apathy, and a gradual elimination of religion from public life and policy.

The danger is that people who still see a value in religion will be marginalised unless they are prepared to be active in its defence.

The "they" should read "you and I".

This subtle marginalisation has, as you are aware, already begun.

I am convinced that the erosion of Christian values can come from within as well as from without. However, I do not feel defeated or share any sense of despair. The remedies have got to be put in place urgently if the Christian Church is to be a relevant influence in Society.

So, where do we begin?

We could begin at the top and try to produce some masterplan to re-invigorate the Church from the top down.

This topic - the question of the central governance of the Catholic Church - certainly seems to take up acres of newsprint.

This discussion tends to surround the role of the Papacy and the Roman Curia.

I do not deny for a second that these issues are important. Neither do I deny for a second that the central governance of the Church is likely to undergo some changes in the centuries to come.

Collegiality, for example, has to develop. The present Holy Father is anxious to look at how this can come about. His internationalisation of the Curia and the College of Cardinals is a very evident example of his desire to make sure that the central government of the Church takes account of the worldwide situation, rather than seeing things from a purely Roman viewpoint.

Such a move has been widely welcomed and is only just in a Church whose centre of gravity is moving to the southern hemisphere.

As for the Curia itself, it exists to serve the Pope and the Universal Church. That is how it defines itself, and generally that is how it operates.

It has a unique insight into the needs of the whole vineyard, an oversight that is not always available to those of us labouring in a particular corner of that vineyard.

The Secretariat of State, for example, has a finger on the pulse of the world, and its insights from that special vantage point, mean that the Pope is probably the best-informed person in the world.

I could expand on this topic further, but I propose to leave it there ... for this reason. I do not believe that the structures of the Roman Curia are a burning issue to the ordinary man and woman trying to live out their Catholic faith in the world.

Of far greater impact on the lives of most Catholics are the strengths and weaknesses of the local Church, both in terms of spiritual leadership and the faith commitment of the laity.

And so I would say that the most important locus for the re-invigoration of the Church in the new century lies in the parish.

The parish is in urgent need of spiritual renewal. We have to face up to it ... there is a yawning gap in the on-going spiritual formation of adults from the end of their school days onwards. For many practising Catholics, the only vestige of formation they get is in the weekly homily.

One generation, in particular has suffered in this way. I mean the people who are now young parents, but who themselves had their formative years in the turbulence following Vatican II.

This generation suffered because RE text books were too quickly shelved because they seemed to be out of date, but there was nothing to replace them. There was widespread confusion among teachers about what they were expected to teach.

This was a worldwide phenomenon. This period of confusion, coinciding, as it did, with the widespread cultural changes of the 1960s and 70s, means we now have a generation who cannot pass on values to their own children, because their own formation is so weak.

This phenomenon, though, is not confined to young people. Sometimes the older generations, too, seem disillusioned about their traditional values and hesitate, in fact, sometimes refuse to pass them on.

The truth is that at present, even after nearly 40 years we are a Church in transition. Many of the changes in the Church from Vatican II were intended to encourage people to make a knowing and free commitment to the values of the Christian life. The new attitudes repealed many exterior laws and regulations in the hope that the principles underlying them would be internalised.

A high degree of moral maturity was thus required and assumed. The response shows that not everyone was ready for that step. Psychologists must have viewed with some apprehension the subsequent amount of changes within a brief space of time.

So the Church enters the 21st century in a state of transition with some of its members feeling nostalgia for the past and a general sense of fragmentation. Fortunately the breach caused by some traditionalists under Archbishop Lefebvre seems to be nearing healing.

The predominant image of the Vatican II Church is "communion" – a community which reaches out and can achieve union with God and the unity of the human race.

This image of communion really needs to take root in the local community of the parish.

When I say that the parish is in urgent need of renewal, I do not mean that structural changes loom large. Rather I mean that if the Church wishes to interpret her mission and respond to the needs of a fragmented and much-changed world, she cannot enclose herself in a rigidity of forms, but has to feel herself called to search for better and new ways of proclaiming the Good News.

Some of these new forms are visible in the emergence of the new movements in the Church.

I read recently in *Civiltà Cattolica* that there are now over 60 of these lay movements recognised by the Church and offering a new dynamism wherever they operate. Many of them try to close the gap in Christian life by offering an effective formation to young adults in the post-school years.

These new expressions of Christianity are genuine fruits of the Council and should be seen as such ... seen to be complementing, not threatening the parish and diocesan structures with which we are so familiar.

A few years ago I asked the Holy Father why these movements seem to have greater success than the traditional Christian lifestyle. He said: "I don't know for sure, but I think it is because they are a greater sign of contradiction to the world ..."

I have often reflected on that. It's true that these movements show a greater sense of the Christian being "different". Maybe the rest of us are too keen to go with the tide, not being different enough.

Elsewhere in the world we see other new forms of Christian life emerging.

I think of the great insights of the conferences of Latin American Bishops at Medellin and Puebla

It was there too that the discernment took place of a liberation theology and the importance of basic Christian communities – another way of being Church which does not threaten or rebel against the diocesan and parish structures, but rather compliments them.

All over Latin America and Africa we see these groups meeting together to support each other, to study the scriptures, to pray together and to be a living "Church in miniature" in the heart of the great cities of Latin America and the small villages of southern Africa.

Here in Glasgow we are embarking on a similar path, trying to establish small neighbourhood groups who will meet together to reflect on the Word of God and apply that to what is happening in their area – to share faith and then reach out. Faith and action.

In this way we aim to build up a community spirit so that the parish becomes a communion of communities. Whatever the nature or size of a Christian community, be it family, parish, neighbourhood, diocesan or national – or indeed international – there are certain elements which require to be developed to the full.

These are: Communion/community; liturgy and worship; service and witness.

The Church of the new century urgently needs to develop all of these areas.

Ever since his election as Bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul II has proclaimed as his life's work a new evangelisation. A new and second effort at proclaiming the good news to the men and women of our time.

He says this thrust needs to be new in its fervour, its expression and its strategy.

The fervour will be measured by the enthusiasm of the entire Christian family. In other words a new obligation rests on every baptised member of the Church.

This is what the Council called the "universal call to sanctity and apostolate."

Each person is called upon to be a subject of evangelisation - to evangelise – and also to be the object of evangelisation – to be evangelised and improve their formation.

The new evangelisation is new in its *expression* because it needs to find new ways of appealing to the man and woman of the new century. The Holy Father covers this in his message for World Communications Day this year, where he gives his "*imprimatur*" you might say, to the new technologies of the internet and satellite television as useful tools for the Church to use in getting her message across.

The new evangelisation will be new in its *strategy* because it will require us to develop ever more effective ways of reaching out to people – perhaps learning from the world. I think of the concept of life-long learning as one concept we could profitably import from the secular world, for example. Distance learning is another new possibility for us as are the erstwhile undreamed of resource that is the internet and e-mail, both of which offer great potential for spreading the word.

Even the children in our primary schools are more aware than we adults are of the Church's vast resources to be found on the internet.

Communication is now worldwide and instantaneous. We have to make sure that we are part of this scene or we will always struggle.

Now, wherever they are, people can join the Holy Father as he recites the Angelus live every Sunday from Rome or Castel Gandolfo; We can take part, from our own sitting room, in the great events like World Youth Day or the Day of the Family through Catholic television channels broadcasting free by satellite.

Equally, via internet, I can read and digest the contents of the Holy Father's message to priests for Holy Thursday at exactly the same time as it is being presented to journalists in Rome.

These are great tools we have at our disposal. It is for us to work them into our efforts at evangelisation.

The Church of the new century, besides being a Church of communication, (a skill we have never been particularly good at up until our own day) will also be a Church of dialogue. This dialogue extends to civil society, to other world faiths, to Christian denominations and within the Church herself.

Paul VI covers these in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*.

Love alone opens the way to the truth. And so, the continuing good and open relationships of all who believe in God and those who do not, will help this latter group to see the loving compassionate and caring face of Christ in us.

I should like to turn now to a central point I feel must be the cornerstone of our efforts in the new century, that is a rediscovery of the Eucharist, its meaning and its essential role in our lives.

Vatican II gave us the beginnings of greater participation in the liturgy, that is the worship of God and the prayer life of the Church.

The last 40 years have not been without their problems of course. Nevertheless great graces have emerged. A new appreciation with and familiarity with the Word of God is undoubtedly evident in today's Church in a way that was not true before the Council.

This allows the kind of faith sharing groups to develop which I hope will bring about a profound transformation of our communities.

Encouraging young children to pray is now an integral part of every religious lesson in our primary schools. They are learning to pray together, to talk to God, to reflect on the life of Jesus and the saints in a way that is new ... and they love it.

By praying I don't mean reciting formulae, but rather speaking from the heart. So many of us who have struggled with mental prayer as adults should know that it can be learned for more effectively in childhood! And if that capacity for prayer is awakened early it remains with a child throughout life.

Of course prayer cannot be confined to a silent dialogue between the believer and God. To put flesh and blood on this, the Church has always insisted on a regular period of adoration, thanksgiving, repentance and petition. The Church has sought to interpret what Jesus expects of us by insisting on the Sunday Eucharist as a *sine qua non* for every Catholic.

What follows is not a comfortable series of questions, but nevertheless they need to be asked.

- Could it be that the Roman Catholics of today have lost belief in the worship of God?
- Could it be that the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ mean less and less to them?
- Could it be that the ordinary rank and file members of the Church need to have their minds refreshed about the meaning of the Eucharist, about the action of the Mass, about the need for *the Dies Domini* celebration?

If statistics are anything to go by, the answer to each of those questions is yes.

I confess to you quite readily that I am concerned that Catholic children in Scotland today are not being encouraged to think of a weekly "God spot" in their lives.

That is why I, and many others involved in the pastoral life of the Church in Scotland, are becoming ever more convinced of the need for a new focus, a new emphasis and catechesis on the importance of the Sunday Mass in the life of the Christian.

Look at the statistics for weekend Mass attendance in any country in Europe. With the exception of Ireland and Malta, they very seldom rise above 25 per cent. In Scotland the average is around 33 per cent, comparatively high, but still pretty awful. It means that two thirds of our Catholics no longer worship with us.

What happens when people deprive themselves of this appointment on a Sunday morning?

- They cut themselves off from a caring, friendly community of faith who could help them and support them.
- They cut themselves off from the sacraments and thus the source of grace.
- They decimate the Christian community and are deprived of its support.
- They put themselves outside the active, praying family of God.
- They deny themselves the insights and wisdom of the Word of God.
- They miss the chance to have their faith developed, either through the homily or through further study or reading, or at least encouragement.
- They deprive their children of their birthright, their culture and their identity.
- They leave themselves at the mercy of the latest passing trend and whim of the secular society, without any antidote.

It is tragically true to say that for many Scots Catholics, the highest act of worship of the Catholic faith – the re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary – is simply "not worth the bother".

When Catholics no longer feel the need to come together to thank God for their lot, Christian life in those communities is at a low ebb.

Of course the non-attenders are not alone when we apportion blame for this situation. We their pastoral leaders are equally culpable.

We took it for granted for too long that people would keep coming to Mass on Sunday, that they would regard the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life.

We can't take it for granted any more.

The re-establishment of the Sunday celebration of the Mass as a norm in the Catholic community therefore needs to be the top priority for the new century.

I believe that the Church of the new century also needs to be a Church of witness.

That is why, I believe, the Holy Father is very keen to canonise modern saints – saints who will be role models for the men and women of our time. And perhaps we need modern saints today more than ever

It is when we are hardest hit – as in the 16th century – that we as a Church tend to come back to life.

That resurrection begins from within, usually through the influence of a few saintly people. At the high point of the Reformation it's said that there were 10 subsequently canonised saints living within a few hundred metres of each other around St Philip Neri's *Chiesa Nuova* in Rome.

We see that pattern of persecution leading to sanctity leading to growth even in our own day as we read accounts of the lives of martyrs like Edith Stein and Maximilian Kolbe, the stories of the Spanish Civil War martyrs or the victims of Communist persecution in eastern Europe.

And so, learning from history I look to the new century to be also a century of saints. The last time I visited the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome, I heard there are 2000 people on the list waiting to be beatified or canonised, and most of them are lay-people – so take heart!

I mean a century in which Christians will take seriously the priesthood of all the baptised; the universal call to holiness and the need to read the signs of their times.

Such a vibrant Christianity may produce one or two great prophetic figures. On the other hand it may produce a myriad of "little prophets" – men and women who know how to show by the way they live their lives that Jesus Christ is alive in His Church and His world, yesterday today and forever.

Both are needed ... the great prophetic voices like the Holy Father and the small, hidden apostolate of so many saints of everyday life who know how to achieve a heroic degree of sanctity in their everyday activities in the office, the shop, the factory or the home.

If enough of these saints of the new century emerge, then I believe the new springtime of evangelisation dreamed of by Blessed John XXIII at the convocation of the Council, may soon dawn.

It is fascinating to speculate about the Church's mission in the years to come. Much will depend on the kind of leadership the Church enjoys.

But before we reflect on leadership, it is important to note that there are many areas of present concern which are not likely to disappear while this century is still young.

I am thinking about the shortage of priests and the lack of any stable pattern of vocations to the priesthood. The many factors which go to make this a real concern are not going to go away unless there is a radical shift in society's attitudes.

One factor which is frequently overlooked is the birthrate which continues to decline all over Europe. Fewer people mean fewer vocations and we are going to have to get used to the idea that we are unlikely to have a community of priests in many parishes.

There is always potential in every problem, of course. The laity, if hitherto unwilling, might well be forced by circumstances to play a more active role in the life of the parish. The fact that many may have to travel some distance to Mass on a Sunday is generally made more feasible because of the growing numbers of people who either own or have access to a car.

Parishes may have to close. And we need to answer the question, "Did we ever really need all the church buildings we presently have?"

The priestly life and ministry will come up for discussion. Must all Catholic priests be celibate for instance? That question has been answered, although by way of exception by the fact that there are many married ex-Anglican priests who are now Catholic priests in the active ministry.

But the question continues to be asked: should celibacy go? One of the characteristics of our society is the desire for endless change. The mood is, if it's changeable, let's experiment.

But in a world that is sex mad, or being made to see everything in terms of sexuality, is there no longer to be any room for a lifestyle which reminds people that sexual activity can be sacrificed for a greater good? Is it not important to remind people that family life can be surrendered so as to be a sign that there is something higher than this present life?

At a time when there is great turbulence about sex and all its implications, is this really the best time to abandon the celibate life freely accepted and offered for the kingdom of God?

Another area of turbulence is the future of religious life.

Here I think we can see present trends in an unduly negative way. Of course we have to ask ourselves what will be the future for many religious communities and congregations in the face of fewer vocations.

We certainly see a great fall in the numbers of those taking up religious life. On the face of it, it seems not so good.

But we need to take account of the previous relative abundance. Religious congregations and people devoting themselves to certain sacred causes have always been in response to the needs of the Church and the age.

Over the last 200 years or so, education was a clamant need; care of the sick was another; care of the poor, the homeless ... Thousands of young men and women gave their lives for these causes. To a great extent these needs are all taken care of now in other ways, mainly through the welfare state.

In the past the number of people entering the religious life was higher than today because the needs were greater.

Today the need is for witness in the market place – where the action is. The universal call to holiness of Vatican II implied that, fine though it is, you need not enter the cloister to be holy. The laity are called to witness in temporal society, to reach places others cannot reach. Hence the growth in the new religious movements I mentioned earlier.

Much of the future of the Church in the new century will depend on the calibre of leadership it enjoys, and I mean leadership from the laity – that sleeping giant – as well as from the clergy.

The laity need to be offered the space to exercise their charisms in the Church. We need to do this more effectively and with greater urgency.

There are certain characteristics of leadership which must be taken into account.

A leader needs to challenge; to inspire a shared vision; to enable others to act; to model the way forward and encourage the heart.

Pope John Paul has given and continues to give us this kind of leadership. In his most recent letter to the Church at the end of the Holy Year and the start of the new millennium he urges us: "Duc in altum... " Cast out into the deep, (that's where the fish are).

I would translate that as "Take the plunge".

Before I end let me sum up how I would hope the Church of the new century will be in four words: Living, free, courageous and involved.

Living because she will continue to confront the men and women of the new century with a coherent and vibrant message which makes moral and intellectual demands on them, demands which produce good fruits. Fruits of love and compassion and solidarity and faith.

Free because never before has the Church been more free of the shackles of temporal power than she is today. And, freed from these golden shackles, she can make her voice heard loudly and clearly, even in the face of worldly power.

Courageous because the Church will increasingly be called to be a sign of contradiction to society and all it holds dear. That means the Church must be prepared to face down the values of this world, and denounce oppression, immorality, sin and its structures even when doing so earns a crown of martyrdom – literal or metaphorical.

And involved because the Church purified will be a Church at the heart of the world – involved in the day to day struggles of all peoples, especially the marginalised, those without a voice and those who are excluded. This is the Church of the future that I can begin to see emerging ... a purified Church, a renewed Church, a brave Church, a humble Church.

I should like to leave you tonight with words which I often cite ... words of inspiration: "In this world of change, we must neither live nor work in a past which no longer exists, nor in the present which is running away from us. If we plan the future, we must begin NOW."