

## ST. MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE AND JANSENISM

I thank you for inviting me to speak tonight. The topic is ‘St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and Jansenism.’ So first, a note on Jansenism, a 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century heresy mainly in France; then, the life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, a mystic and Visitation Sister, died 1690; finally, some thoughts on the Sacred Heart of Jesus in today’s context. I cannot claim to be an expert on Jansenism nor on St. Margaret Mary, but I am especially interested in the relevance of the theology of the Sacred Heart for us today.

1. Jansenism

So to begin, Jansenism, with first, a few useful preliminaries about doctrine.

It is important to differentiate doctrine from theology.<sup>1</sup> In broad brush strokes, the Church’s doctrine on faith and morals is the teaching that Christ has revealed to us for our salvation. It is contained in the Scriptures, the creeds, the teachings of popes and councils down the centuries, the texts of the Liturgy and, accessibly, in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Theology, on the other hand, is commentary, guidance, opinion, insight and speculation about doctrine. Theologians seek to explore doctrine, to understand it, to expound its relevance, to unpack its meaning for believers today. Anyone does theology insofar as they reflect on faith and its meaning for their life. To take the analogy of a river, doctrine acts like the riverbanks; theology is the flow. Doctrine channels the flow, giving it direction, whereas theology is the flow itself, now slow, sometimes in a rush, shallow at this point, deeper at that. Without doctrine to guide the flow, the result would be a flood-plane with all the damage that entails.

The Church’s doctrine has different grades of importance and solemnity. It has an organisation and a hierarchy. As the 1997 *General Directory for Catechesis* explains, there is a hierarchy of truths, centred on the most fundamental or essential truth of all, the mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity.<sup>2</sup> This doctrine, and the rest of the Church’s teaching following on from it, directly and indirectly, is what Christians must believe for their salvation.<sup>3</sup> Over time, as Cardinal John Henry Newman famously observed, doctrine develops and in a certain sense expands as new questions arise and as the Church engages with new situations, new cultures and new ideas requiring new answers and new directions, although always with the same identity within the same line of development.<sup>4</sup> The authority to determine this, that is, to differentiate an authentic development of doctrine from a corruption of doctrine, especially when a truth of faith is disputed, ultimately belongs to the Church’s magisterium, her teaching authority, the

<sup>1</sup> Helpful here is Bernard Lonergan’s distinction between doctrines and systematics: see Bernard Lonergan SJ *Method in Theology* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd: 1971) 295-353

<sup>2</sup> See Congregation for the Clergy *General Directory of Catechesis* (London, CTS: 1997) 114; cf.

<sup>3</sup> See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian* (London, CTS: 1990). Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church. Second and Revised Edition* (London, CTS: 2016) – henceforth referred to as CCC - 234.

<sup>4</sup> Doctrinal development but especially in his 1845 Essay on Development: see J. H. Cardinal Newman *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine. Foreword by Ian Ker* (University of Notre Dame Press: 1989)

bishops with the pope. Thus, for instance, in the controversies during the Protestant Reformation about the sacrificial nature of the Mass, it was the pope and the bishops gathered in an ecumenical council, the Council at Trent, that determined and articulated the true doctrine to be believed.<sup>5</sup> Over the last few centuries, the instruments of authority have become more sophisticated. Today, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the CDF, is the principle agency that deals with day-to-day doctrinal matters. The CDF is the successor to the 'The Holy Office,' itself the successor to the infamous Congregation established by Paul III in 1542, the Inquisition.

The point is, the Church believes she has the authority not only to teach in the name of Christ but also to safeguard the doctrine of Christ, condemning if need be teachings deemed erroneous and heretical, that is, contrary to the faith received from the Lord. Heresy, from the Greek word *hairesis*, a faction or choice, is often more about what is not said than what is actually said, a partial grasp of truth. In history, it may take some time for an erroneous idea to be accurately identified or effectively overturned; such was the case with some of the early heresies about the Blessed Trinity and the Person of Christ. Moreover, some heresies persist, or disappear and then resurface in new forms, like the neo-Pelagianism and Gnosticism that Pope Francis discusses in his recent Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*.<sup>6</sup> To hold stubbornly to a false doctrine on a major point of Christian belief would *de facto* put a person out of full communion with the Church; they would be 'ex-communicate,' and thus unable to receive the sacraments. In the past, heresy often led to a formal censure and public excommunication. This is far less frequent today<sup>7</sup>.

Hopefully, this background is helpful in considering the heresy of Jansenism.

Jansenism is named after the Flemish theologian Cornelius Jansen, a professor at the University of Louvain, later Bishop of Ypres, and the author of the *Augustinus*, a book published posthumously in 1640. In fact, Jansenism originated in the early seventeenth century with the reform of the convent of Port-Royal under Mother Angélique Arnauld in association with the Abbot of Saint-Cyran; it then grew into a movement that lasted well into the eighteenth century. As with all movements, it was as much an attitude or mind-set, an approach or atmosphere, as a clearly defined set of theological positions and spiritual practices that the Church would eventually condemn. Indeed, Jansenism was one aspect of a whole series of complex controversies that racked the Church in the post-Reformation period, particularly in France, about the correct understanding of the Christian's relationship to the world and the relationship between God's grace and human free will.<sup>8</sup> These disputes at various times pitted the Jesuits against the Dominicans and the secular clergy against the religious. Not unlike some of today's

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<sup>5</sup> See the General Council of Trent: Thirteenth Session *Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist* 1551 in ed J. Neuner and J. Dupuis *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church. Seventh Revised and Enlarged Edition* (New York, Alba House: 2001) - henceforth referred to as *ND* followed by the paragraph numbers - 1512-1536 and introductory note pages 615-616.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis *Gaudete et Exsultate. On the Call to Holiness in Today's World* (London, CTS: 2018) 35-62

<sup>7</sup> Modern canon law generally treats excommunication as a medicinal penalty that urges and invites someone to change their behaviour or their attitude, to repent and return to full communion, than as a 'vindictive penalty' designed to punish. See CCC 1463.

<sup>8</sup> See R. Bireley *The Refashioning of Catholicism 1450-1700* (London, Macmillan Press: 1999) 187-191

debates, the contrast was between a more positive Aristotelian-Thomist approach to the world and a more pessimistic Platonic-Augustinian approach. It was also a dispute between those who espoused a return to the early tradition and those who desired to be more accommodating to the spirit of the age.

Jansen, not unlike Calvin and the reformers, wanted to encourage greater personal holiness and a genuine reform of Christian life. He urged believers to take more seriously the goal of salvation.<sup>9</sup> He is said to have read all of Augustine's writings ten times, and Augustine's work on grace, thirty times.<sup>10</sup> Much of the *Augustinus* was based directly on the writings of St. Augustine. But Jansen radicalised Augustine, underlining the damaging effects of original sin on human nature and the limits of free will. Deeply pessimistic about the human condition and the possibility of salvation, he adopted a rigorist approach to morality, reminding readers that God, though just, is a Judge.<sup>11</sup> Without a special intervention of God's grace, human beings are unable to keep the commandments, and given human sinfulness, few will be saved without strict penances and spiritual exercises. Some followers of Jansen espoused predestination, that from the *massa damnata*, the mass of sin that is the human race, God chooses only some for salvation. The Jansenist crucifix symbolised this. It portrayed the body of Christ hanging on the Cross with His arms almost upright in a narrow 'Y' rather than horizontally spread along the crossbeam. The aim was to challenge the viewer to conversion, as the Lord Himself warned: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate, and broad is the road, that leads to destruction and many enter through it."<sup>12</sup>

Jansenists were particularly critical of the Jesuits, who occupied key positions in French ecclesiastical life, accusing them of laxity in their moral teaching and a confessional practice that was too accommodating to the *mores* of the times. The Council of Trent had called for priests to be better prepared for hearing confessions<sup>13</sup> and so theologians created courses that proposed 'cases of conscience' for consideration and which moral principles might be applied. Some of these treatises were highly casuistic, complex and speculative, although they often treated contemporary issues such as whether a girl might choose a marriage partner, or attendance at the theatre was permissible or whether interest might be taken on a loan.<sup>14</sup> Jansenists by contrast took the ancient line of the fathers, deeming the Jesuitical casuistry on such matters as lax. Controversy also related to the sacraments. Antoine Arnauld at Port-Royal wrote a hugely popular book *De la fréquente communion* in which he argued against frequent reception of the Eucharist; it is enough to receive once a year. Later, the scientist and mathematician Blaise Pascal, whilst distancing himself somewhat from the cause, nevertheless became a fiery polemicist against the Jesuits. His book *Provincial Letters*, published in 1659, ridiculed some of the Jesuit casuistry, citing extreme examples. Another combatant was

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<sup>9</sup> See W. David Myers 'Jansen, Cornelius' and 'Jansenism' in ed. R. McBrien *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York, HarperCollins: 1995) 687-688

<sup>10</sup> Bireley 188.

<sup>11</sup> See G. O'Collins and E. Farrugia *A Concise Dictionary of Theology. Revised and Expanded Edition* ((New York, Paulist: 2000) 124-125

<sup>12</sup> Mt 7: 13

<sup>13</sup> See the General Council of Trent: Fourteenth Session *Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance* 25<sup>th</sup> November 1551 in H. Denzinger ed. P. Hünermann *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationem de rebus fidei et morum 43<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (San Francisco, Ignatius: 2012) – henceforth referred to as DH - DH 1667-1693

<sup>14</sup> Bireley 189

Pasquier Quesnell, a Parisian Oratorian who lived in the early eighteenth century and later settled in Amsterdam. He too radicalised Augustine, whilst also proposing a novel concept of grace. For Quesnell, grace was God's gift; when given it was irresistible yet without it, a person would be dead, wholly corrupt and unable to achieve anything.<sup>15</sup>

As the century progressed, the movement became aligned with other causes. It became a vehicle for opinion hostile to Roman centralism. It linked with Gallicanism, which believed in conciliarism, the authority of a general council over the pope, and federalism, the role of the national Church over and against Rome.

It often takes the Church some time to determine and identify the precise nature of a problem, but eventually the Roman Magisterium stepped in, sometimes at the request of the French hierarchy, sometimes at the request of the monarch. In 1642, shortly after its publication, Pope Urban VIII condemned the *Augustinus*. Later, a special commission of the Holy Office examined it again, leading Innocent X in the 1653 Constitution *Cum Occasione* to condemn five specific Jansenist propositions.<sup>16</sup> In 1656 Alexander VII issued a further constitution, *Ad sanctam Beati Petri sedem*,<sup>17</sup> which led to a *Formula of Submission* being drafted that, at the request of King Louis XIV, all clergy and university teachers had to sign.<sup>18</sup> In 1690 the Holy Office issued a further list of Jansenist errors to be avoided, but it was the 1713 constitution *Unigenitus Dei Filius* of Pope Clement XI, listing 101 heterodox propositions from the works of Pasquier Quesnell,<sup>19</sup> that more than anything else sounded the death-knell of Jansenism.

As with other heresies in Church history, Jansenism can never be said to have been entirely eradicated, but with the closure of Port-Royal, the challenge of the new rationalist philosophies of the Enlightenment and the emergence of modern empirical science, a new social context was arising. Theologians began to move on. Indeed, the later pope Clement XII in a bull *Apostolicae providentiae officio* in 1733 sought to promote compromise and greater peace between all the various theological schools, the Dominicans, the Jesuits, the Augustinians. His hope was that all would come together to defend the Church against the dangers of the times.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. St. Margaret Mary Alacoque

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<sup>15</sup> See commentary on Clement XI *Unigenitus Dei Filius* in ND 1990/1. See too the commentary on DH 2001.

<sup>16</sup> The five propositions condemned were:

1. Some of God's precepts are impossible to the just, who wish and strive to keep them, according to the present powers which they have; the grace, by which they are made possible, is also wanting.
2. In the state of fallen nature one never resists interior grace.
3. In order to merit or demerit in the state of fallen nature, freedom from necessity is not required in man, but freedom from external compulsion is sufficient.
4. The Semi-pelagians admitted the necessity of a prevenient interior grace for each act, even for the beginning of faith; and in this they were heretics, because they wished this grace to be such that the human will could either resist or obey.
5. It is Semi-pelagian to say that Christ died or shed His blood for all men without exception.

See ND 1989/1 – 1989/5.

<sup>17</sup> See DH 2010-2012

<sup>18</sup> DH 2020

<sup>19</sup> DH 2400-2502; cf. ND 826-828.

<sup>20</sup> See DH 2509-2510 and commentary

Now to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. Margaret Alacoque was born in July 1647 in the town of Janots in Burgundy to Claude and Philiberte Alacoque. She was the fifth of seven children.<sup>21</sup> A middle-class family, her father was a distinguished notary, but after his sudden death in 1655 when Margaret was eight, the family home was run by Claude's mother and brother. Margaret at that time commenced her formal education; she went away to a convent school in Charolles run by the Poor Clares. It was there she made her First Communion, but the following year, aged nine, contracted a painful and totally debilitating rheumatic illness that kept her bedridden for the next six years. Having left school, she was looked after at home but was treated harshly by the family. At fifteen, she made a sudden recovery, which in her *Autobiography*, she ascribed to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary to whom she undertook a vow.<sup>22</sup> It was during those years that her contemplative nature began to develop with regular Communion, a profound devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and a keen sense of the spiritual value of suffering. Later, from the age of twenty, she began to experience visions of Christ.

Her family had expected her to marry but she became convinced that her vocation was to be a nun. In June 1671, aged twenty-four, she joined the Visitation Convent in Paray-le-Monial, "my dear Paray" as she used to call it.<sup>23</sup> As a novice, she was patient and charitable, but in mundane matters and daily tasks, clumsy and impractical, something that drew the ire of her fellow nuns and superiors, who complained about her and rebuked her. Nevertheless, in November 1672 she was allowed to make her profession. It was clear that she was already far advanced in the contemplative life, and from 1673 to 1675 especially, she experienced a series of dramatic visions of Christ. She said He spoke to her in specialised revelations that sometimes included knowledge of what was going on interiorly in the hearts of the other nuns. Unsurprisingly, she was frequently rejected by them or dismissed as delusional. Moreover, her claims were deemed suspicious by Mother Superior and by the theologians she consulted.

However, in 1679 things began to change when she found a supporter in the new Jesuit confessor appointed to the convent, Fr. Claude de la Colombière (canonised in 1992). It was he who would make Margaret Mary's visions widely known, insisting on their authenticity. A further change of fortune occurred in 1683 when a new Mother Superior was appointed, Mother Melin, who made Margaret the novice mistress and also assistant superior. Margaret was highly effective as novice-mistress and she inspired her novices by what she told them about the visions and messages she had received. In 1685, Fr. Claude asked her to write an account of her revelations in a book that is now known as *The Autobiography of Saint Margaret Mary*. Not long after, when serving a second term as assistant superior, she was taken ill. Aged forty-three, she died as she

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<sup>21</sup> For a classic, see C. Garside *Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque. A Brief Account of her Life* (London, Burns and Oates: 1874). Here we also rely on A. Jones 'Margaret Mary Alacoque' in *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Saints* (Ware, Wordsworth Editions: 1992), M. Walsh ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints* (Tonbridge Wells, Burns and Oates: 1985), P. Burns ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints. New Concise Edition* (London, Burns and Oates: 2003) and D. H. Farmer *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints. Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1987). See also E. B. Marsh *Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque and the Sacred Heart of Jesus* (Boston, Pauline: 2018) and the Sisters of the Visitation ed. *The Autobiography of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque* (Charlotte NC, Tan Books: 1930).

<sup>22</sup> See *Autobiography* 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Autobiography* 33.

was being anointed on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1690, the date now kept as her feast day. Beatified by Pope Pius IX in 1864, she was canonised by Benedict XV in 1920.

What was the key message of the visions? According to Margaret Mary, Christ was asking her to be His instrument to spread the love of His Sacred Heart throughout the world. In 1675 shortly after Corpus Christi, Jesus appeared to her and said:

“Behold the Heart that has so loved mankind but receives only ingratitude from most of them. ..What is most sad is that many souls consecrated to me are the ones who treat me this way.”<sup>24</sup>

She herself once said:

“Could you realise what happiness it is to love the Sacred Heart of Jesus, you would despise all else to love but It alone.”<sup>25</sup>

As she wrote in one of her letters:

“The Sacred Heart is an inexhaustible fountain and Its sole desire is to pour Itself out into the hearts of the humble so as to free them and prepare them to lead lives according to His good pleasure.”<sup>26</sup>

She added:

“This divine Heart is an ocean full of good things, wherein poor souls can cast all their needs; it is an ocean full of joy to drown all our sadness, an ocean of humility to drown our folly, an ocean of mercy for those in distress, an ocean of love in which to submerge our poverty.”<sup>27</sup>

The instructions Christ gave her became more specific over time, yet they principally comprised three requests: first, that a special feast of the Sacred Heart be established on the Friday after Corpus Christi. It took some time to convince the community to do this but in 1686 an image of the Sacred Heart was painted and installed in a specially dedicated chapel. One ought to add here that, remarkably, this was also the period when St. John Eudes, the founder of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, in the face of hostility and opposition from the Jansenists, published his book *Devotion to the Adorable Heart of Jesus*. The spread of this Sacred Heart devotion was rapid. Soon, King Louis XIV adopted the image of the Sacred Heart and had it painted on his standard. In the early eighteenth century the feast of the Sacred Heart spread from Paray-le-Monial throughout France and Spain. In 1856 Pope Pius IX extended it to the universal Church and in 1873 France was consecrated to the Sacred Heart at the same time as the basilica of Sacré Coeur opened in Paris.

Secondly, the Lord asked that the faithful to receive Holy Communion on the first Fridays of the month. This practice became known as the Nine First Fridays. Margaret Mary said that in a vision Jesus had told her:

“In the excess of the mercy of my Heart, I promise you that my all-powerful love will grant to all those who will receive Communion on the First Fridays, for nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance: they will not die in my

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<sup>24</sup> Cited in E. Lodi (trans J. Aumann) *Saints of the Roman Calendar* (New York, Alba House: 1992) 314.

<sup>25</sup> *Autobiography* frontispiece.

<sup>26</sup> Lodi 315

<sup>27</sup> Cited in P. Burns *Butler's Lives of the Saints* 483

displeasure, nor without receiving the sacraments; and my Heart will be their secure refuge in that last hour.”<sup>28</sup>

Keeping the First Fridays became popular in the Church in the period up to Vatican II.

A third request was that an hour of prayer in reparation for sins be held every Thursday evening in memory of the Lord’s agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Again, this was a devotion that became widespread and is known today as making a ‘Holy Hour.’ Today, Holy Hours take many different forms and take place at different times, but essentially the purpose is to spend an hour in prayer with Jesus.

The legacy of Margaret Mary Alacoque has been enormous, especially when joined to that of the parallel St. John Eudes. Her visions of Christ and the messages she received, with their emphasis on God’s infinite love, mercy and forgiveness for every individual person, ran exactly in the opposite direction to that of the more distant and judgmental God of the Jansenists. Devotion to the Sacred Heart was promoted enthusiastically by the Jesuits, particularly by Fr. John Croiset SJ, the spiritual director to Margaret Mary in succession to Claude de la Colombière.<sup>29</sup> Fr. Croiset after her death helped to make devotion to the Sacred Heart known to all of the faithful. Thus in 1691, he published an account of Margaret Mary’s revelations, together with some of her prayers, in a book called *The Devotion to the Sacred Heart*. It was this new spiritual movement of devotion to the Sacred Heart, “rich in mercy to those who call upon Him” and especially to sinners, that more than anything else vanquished Jansenism.

But Margaret Mary’s legacy has been greater than this. Her work in time transformed the Church’s popular spirituality. Nowadays, most Catholic churches have statues of the Sacred Heart. More, in 1956 Pope Pius XII, on the centenary of the institution of the universal feast of the Sacred Heart by Pope Pius IX, issued a landmark Encyclical Letter *Haurietis Aquas*.<sup>30</sup> This laid out in detail the theological foundations and why this devotion should be central to every Christian’s spirituality. The Heart of Jesus is hypostatically united to the Person of the Incarnate Son of God and that Heart is the symbol of God’s boundless love for human beings.<sup>31</sup> *Haurietis Aquas* also recalls the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, speaking about the wound in Christ’s side from which

“there flowed water for cleansing, blood for redeeming. Hence blood is associated with the Sacrament of the Eucharist, water with the Sacrament of Baptism, which has its cleansing power by virtue of the Blood of Christ.”

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Autobiography* 57

<sup>29</sup> The devotion to the Sacred Heart spread rapidly as seen from the history of the delightful *Litany of the Sacred Heart* and its 33 invocations. This Litany in its modern form was approved in 1899 by Pope Leo XIII for use, but it synthesises several other earlier litanies. In 1691, Fr. Croiset composed a litany of 17 invocations, then in 1718 Venerable Anne Madeleine Remuzat added a further 10 invocations. Six more, written by Sister Madeleine Joly of Dijon in 1686, were added by the Sacred Congregation for Rites in 1899, to make a total of 33, one for each year of Christ’s life. More, witness too the explosion of prayer books, holy pictures and cards published ever since for the use of the faithful.

<sup>30</sup> See Pius XII *Encyclical Haurietis Aquas On Devotion To The Sacred Heart* (15<sup>th</sup> May 1956) – available online at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_15051956\\_haurietis-aquas.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_15051956_haurietis-aquas.html) (April 2018).

<sup>31</sup> *Haurietis Aquas* 21-22

The wound in Christ's side and the holes left by the nails are the way into Christ's Heart.<sup>32</sup> The worship of the Sacred Heart, Pope Pius adds, is thus a summary of all our religion, helping us to know Christ intimately and to imitate Him more perfectly.

In the twentieth century down to today, devotion to the Sacred Heart has been given a new impetus by the mystical revelations of St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who lived at one time in Vilnius and then later in Krakow, where she died in 1938. She was an especially important influence on the life and thought of Pope John Paul II, who canonised her in the Year 2000. Not unlike St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. St. Faustina was directed to write down her visions and recollections, which she did in Notebooks, and these have been organized chronologically and published as her *Diary*.<sup>33</sup> The core message she received is God's unlimited merciful love towards all, the 'Divine Mercy.' Her mystical visions led her to direct an artist to paint the first Divine Mercy image, an image now common throughout the Church. It depicts the Person of Christ with two rays of light, one white, one red, coming from His Heart with an inscription underneath 'Jesus I trust in you.' In one of the *Notebooks*, Faustina explains:

“The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water, which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood, which is the life of souls... These two rays issued forth from the very depths of My tender mercy when My agonized Heart was opened by a lance on the Cross.”<sup>34</sup>

The message of St. Faustina revolves around asking God for His mercy, trusting in Christ's abundant mercy and showing mercy towards others. It includes veneration of the image, keeping the Second Sunday of Easter as 'Divine Mercy Sunday,' the recitation of the Divine Mercy Chaplet, the designation of 3 o'clock as the Hour of Mercy and doing acts of mercy towards others in preparation for the Second Coming.

### 3. Some Thoughts on the Importance of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for today.

Now to conclude with a brief thought on the legacy of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and the centrality of the Sacred Heart for Christians today.

The Feast of the Sacred Heart, now a solemnity, is celebrated universally. But in 2002, in the light of the clergy abuse crisis, Pope John Paul II designated it as an annual World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests. Building on this sentiment, the need for holiness, when appointed Bishop of Portsmouth six years ago, I took as the episcopal motto *In Corde Iesu* 'In the Heart of Jesus.' My coat of arms, which arguably is highly distinctive, shews a white hart drinking from the waters, recalling Psalm 42 'Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you my God.' St. Augustine once famously said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."<sup>35</sup> In this way the episcopal coat of arms invites the viewer to find peace, joy and fulfilment in the Heart

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<sup>32</sup> *Haurietis Aquas* 76-79

<sup>33</sup> See St. Maria Faustina Wowska *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul* (Stockbridge MA, Marian Press: 2014)

<sup>34</sup> Notebook 1 n. 299 in Faustina 139

<sup>35</sup> Augustine *Confessions* Lib 1, 1-2, 2.5, 5 (CSEL 33, 1-5). This passage appears in the Liturgy of the Hours Office of Readings for the Ninth Sunday of the year.



of Christ, drinking from Him the refreshing waters of life. The seven-pointed star overhead represents Mary, *Stella Maris* and Star of the New Evangelisation. I chose this motto in order to focus people not on family, history or the institution of the Church but explicitly on the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Church in Britain faces huge challenges in pursuing the new evangelisation recent popes have called for, an evangelisation, to use the words of Pope John Paul II, that is “new in its ardour, new in its methods and new in its expression.”<sup>36</sup> Yet, as Pope John Paul II said later:

“We are .. not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which He gives us: I am with you!”<sup>37</sup>

Evangelisation is not a programme or a scheme but a Person, Jesus Christ, a Divine Person, Whose Heart is full of mercy and love for each individual from conception to natural death, and Who calls people to discipleship, to labour in the earthly Vineyard of His Kingdom and one day to enjoy eternal life with Him in heaven.

In the fifty or so years since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has inevitably focused much time and energy on internal change and development. These issues, as any glance at *The Tablet* and the so-called Catholic blogosphere evinces, are often highly politicised: the ordination of women deacons, an end to celibacy, Holy Communion for the divorced and remarried, amalgamating parishes, financing new structures, and so on. Yet all these internal concerns, however important, surely pale into insignificance in light of the mandate for mission and evangelisation Christ has given His Church: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations” (Mt 28: 20)? The purpose of the Church, as Paul VI said, is not to be an inward-looking huddle, but to be outward-facing, going forth to evangelise,<sup>38</sup> a missionary option that as Pope Francis has noted, includes practical service of the poor.<sup>39</sup> The call to mission in the British context is now acute. Islam is the fastest growing religious group; those professing Christianity are now in a minority, while ‘nones,’ people of no religion, number 1 in 4; indeed, some say 1 in 2.<sup>40</sup> Catholics make up 8% of the population, thus for the Diocese of Portsmouth, about 240,000 out of 3.129M persons. Yet of

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<sup>36</sup> John Paul II ‘The Task of the Latin American Bishop’, Address to CELAM, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1983; English translation in *Origins* 12 (4 March 1983) 659-62.

<sup>37</sup> John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6<sup>th</sup> January 2001) 29 – online at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html) (April 2018)

<sup>38</sup> “Evangelising is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise, that is, to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace” Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi* DH 4573

<sup>39</sup> “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 evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented” Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel* (London, CTS: 2013) 27.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. the ONS Census figures for England and Wales for 2011: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html> (April 2018). Stephen Bullivant argues that the actual number of ‘nones’ is much higher at almost 1 in 2 of the population: see his masterly study conducted for the Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, St. Mary’s University Twickenham, and published in May 2016: S. Bullivant *Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales. A Statistical Report based on recent British Social Attitudes Survey data*: online at [www.stmarys.ac.uk/benedict-xvi/docs/2016-may-contemporary-catholicism-report.pdf](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/benedict-xvi/docs/2016-may-contemporary-catholicism-report.pdf) (April 2018)

these only 14% are practicing. Even this masks the magnitude of the challenge. For in Portsmouth over the last 25 years, especially its urban centres, there has been a massive influx of immigrant Catholic groups such as Filipinos, Keralans and Poles, suggesting that much of the former Anglo-Irish constituency has evaporated.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is arguably central to new evangelisation. For what is needed is an ‘attitudinal’ shift that many older Catholics find difficult, the shift from an ecclesiocentric to a Christocentric world-view. This implies less absorption with the Church, with churchy things, with change in the Church, with the doctrines, practices and structures of the Church and a greater, more vibrant concern with the Person of Jesus Christ, with proclaiming the kerygma, with the meaning of his death and resurrection, with service of the needy, with personal and intentional discipleship. This is not to divorce Christ from his Church. To be Christian is to be ecclesial; as Pope Francis has said, it is “an absurd dichotomy to think one can live with Jesus, but without the Church, to follow Jesus outside the Church, to love Jesus and not the Church.”<sup>41</sup> But the message of new evangelisation is not about preaching the Church or even filling churches, but about presenting the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. There needs to be less on the Church of the Lord and more on the Lord of the Church. The symbol of the Heart of Christ simply but clearly proclaims that.

Today’s questions are different from those asked by the older generations or at Vatican II. Then, it was: ‘What does it mean to be the Church of Christ in the modern world?’ Today, the issue is more fundamental: ‘Does God exist? And if he does, what difference does Jesus Christ make to my life?’ This goes alongside a renewed sense of the lay apostolate: that the laity not become clericalised, sacristy wall-flowers – though one or two might be a help - but that they seek to serve Christ and to build up the Kingdom by leavening, sanctifying and transforming the secular world.

## Conclusion

Thus to conclude. Jansenism may seem a problem distant from today’s concerns. Yet there will always be those who, given the realities of sinfulness and the challenges to be faced, adopt a more pessimistic outlook on humanity and its prospects. A glib optimism, even less, an anything-goes moral laxity, is not the right antidote either. Surely what is needed is a balanced, critical higher viewpoint, one that takes seriously both our human limitations and our God-given potential. This is not possible without grace actively given. This is where the message of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque is not only relevant; it gives real hope: that God is on our side and wants our good,<sup>42</sup> that the Heart of Christ is patient and rich in mercy unto all who call upon Him, that Jesus intervenes personally in our lives to call us by name and to become His disciples, that He invites us into a passionate friendship with Himself and that we can find Him, adore Him and be refreshed by Him above all in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

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<sup>41</sup> See Pope Francis *Address to Women Religious Superiors* (8 May 2013): available online at [www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-s-address-to-women-religious-superiors](http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-s-address-to-women-religious-superiors) (April 2018)

<sup>42</sup> Rom 8: 31-39

Such a union with Him can fill us with happiness, can transform our situation and one day can bring us to heaven. This is why in my prayers every morning I always say the simple supplication my father taught me as a child to repeat three times and which I now commend to you too: “O Sacred Heart of Jesus I implore the grace to love you daily more and more.”

Thank you for listening.