

THE PRIEST AND SECULARISM: HOW MIGHT WE RESPOND?

I thank Fr. Paul and all of you for inviting me to this Ongoing Formation Day. The title is “The Priest and Secularism: How might we respond?” I will give three inputs, each about 40 minutes, with discussion and questions: the first, secularism; then, new evangelisation; and thirdly, the priesthood.

LECTURE ONE: SECULARISM

1.1 Secularism

So, first of all, secularism. To begin with two experiences as parish priest. First, one morning, a woman parishioner came into sacristy – as ever, just before Mass was about to begin - to ask me to sign a Mass card for her daughter, who had been trying for ages for a baby. The daughter had been undergoing IVF treatment. She was not married. Her mother wanted me to offer the Mass for the success of the IVF treatment.

A second example: a priest who had been having stomach pains, swung by an NHS Drop-in Clinic. The nurse sat him down and after a few exploratory points started asking him invasive questions about his sex-life. He stopped her. All this was irrelevant. He was a Catholic priest. He was vowed to celibacy and chastity. The nurse looked surprised, and exclaimed: Why on earth do you not want to have sex?

In the media, hardly a day goes by without mention of a seeming collision between Britain’s traditional Christian values and today’s so-called ‘secular culture.’ Recent examples include a Pentecostalist couple from Derby who were not permitted to foster children because of their negative views on homosexuality, a ban upheld by the High Court.¹ Then there was a nurse in Somerset who, feeling sorry for an elderly patient, offered to pray for her, for which she was suspended, for failing to demonstrate a professional commitment to equality and diversity.² Again, there was the Catholic girl from Kent who was banned from wearing a crucifix at school.³ And some local councils regularly replace the word ‘Christmas’ with ‘The Holiday Season’ and one year, an Oxford council-funded charity referred to Christmas as ‘The Winter Light Festival.’⁴

¹ BBC News 28th February 2011: see www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-derbyshire-12598896 (September 2014).

² BBC News 1st February 2009: see news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/somerset/7863699.stm (September 2014).

³ BBC News 13th January 2007: see news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/kent/6258451.stm (September 2014).

⁴ *The Daily Telegraph* 2nd November 2008: see www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/3367390/Christmas-banned-in-Oxford-by-council-owned-charity.html (September 2014).

The terms secular, secularism and secularisation are hard to pin down, though everyone uses them. They mean different things to different people, depending on the premises of the speaker. They also mean different things in different places.⁵ European secularism is different from American secularism, and secularism in Britain is different from that of France or southern Italy. Yet there is a family likeness. The term ‘secularism’ was first used by George Holyoake, a 19C agnostic and newspaper editor. He used it to signify a philosophy or way of thinking focused on *this* world rather than the next, that promotes material progress, that espouses a public ethic based on human reason rather than religious principles.⁶ More an attitude than a fully worked-out system of thought, secularism essentially means a concern with the *saeculum*, the world. As Jurgen Habermas, the German social theorist, and the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor observe, secularism has various dimensions: a political dimension, the principle that Church and State, religion and politics, are kept strictly separate; a social dimension, that religion, religious communities and religious beliefs about the meaning of life, the morally good, sex, marriage and the family, God and life after death, are ring-fenced, as matters of private opinion and private association. Religious communities thus cease to influence law, politics, education and social life and become the preserve of specialised sub-groups. There is too an experiential dimension: that in a society in which many do not believe or do not mention God, the religious belief itself becomes harder to sustain.⁷

In Europe, unlike the US, secularism is seen as intrinsic to a pluralist society. To protect the equality of every citizen, especially in the light of immigration and widespread population movements, politicians and policy makers intentionally adopt a neutral stance towards religious groups and personal life-style choices, as long as their behaviour remains within the law. Secularism, although accompanying the rise of atheism, agnosticism and indifference, is not *per se* anti-religious. It does not abolish religion. It ring-fences it; it compartmentalises questions about God and about life-style choices; it brackets them off as personal matters, matters of private opinion, matters not for the public domain. This is the hot issue: the presence and role of religion in the public square. Hard-line secularists seek systematically to exclude religion from public, political and social discourse. As Alasdair Campbell once said when Tony Blair was asked about his beliefs: “We don’t do God.”⁸ Hard-liners seek to free schools, hospitals and state institutions from religion. As the National Secular Society puts it, freedom of religion must respect those who want freedom *from*

⁵ Peter Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (London, Ashgate: 2008).

⁶ “Secularism is that which seeks the development of the physical, moral, and intellectual nature of man to the highest possible point, as the immediate duty of life which inculcates the practical sufficiency of natural morality apart from Atheism, Theism or the Bible which selects as its methods of procedure the promotion of human improvement by material means, and proposes these positive agreements as the common bond of union, to all who would regulate life by reason and ennoble it by service” G. Holyoake *The Principles of Secularism* (London, Austin and Co.: 1870) 17. Cf. discussion in G. D’Costa *Christianity and World Religions* (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell: 2009) 110f.

⁷ Cited in J. Atherton, C. Baker and J. Reader *Christianity and the New Social Order* (London, SPCK: 2011) 4-8.

⁸ See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/3301925.stm> (4th November 2012). He made the comment in 2003 from the sidelines to a journalist interviewing the then Prime Minister Tony Blair who was about to ask the PM about his religious convictions.

religion.⁹ Soft-core secularists, on the other hand, are happy to wish each other ‘Merry Christmas,’ to send their children to Christian schools and to tolerate Britain’s Christian traditions, as long as those who practice Christianity do not expect privileges, do not discriminate against the rights of others and do not seek to impose their beliefs on them.

Secularism is linked to relativism and liberalism, and together, they give rise to a raft of divergent anthropologies: conflicting non-traditional understandings of the dignity and value of being human. Relativism is the view that sees truth as relative: what is true for one group may not be true for another. It grounds liberalism. Liberalism is the ethical philosophy that goodness has no firm foundation or referent and so values and virtues are determined by personal preferences and especially feelings and emotions. The secular state in theory remains neutral, although in practice it is often inconsistent. It cannot make explicit its own ethical commitments and thus refuses to take a stance on what is true and good. Or it imposes a commonly held view, depending on the presuppositions of the legislators. Thus, in the face of competing truth-claims, the state either enforces one group’s truth-claims over another’s (as in the recent debate over so-called gay marriage) or imposes a permissive neutrality. This is exactly the ‘dictatorship of relativism’ Pope Benedict spoke of, where what is good is what the State deems legal.¹⁰ Since liberalising legislation tends to carry within itself the seeds of its own extension, is it inconceivable that if the state can redefine marriage to be a union of two people of the same sex, then why not sibling marriage, or group marriages or even inter-species marriages? Some say it is only a matter of time.

In my own estimation, secularism has features both positive and negative. Positively, it cultivates freedom with respect, whilst enabling mutual collaboration for the common good among people of differing religious view-points. But on the other hand, it has many drawbacks. As we will argue, it dissolves religious faith, undermines ethics and weakens social responsibility. It is at root a form of Christian heresy, a horizontalised version of the Christian world-view, without the ‘sacred canopy.’¹¹ Its ethic is based on the Golden Rule ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ (cf. Luke 6: 13). This in turn leads to a derivative set of values such as tolerance, respect, compassion, equality, diversity, freedom, non-discrimination, inclusivity, integrity and fairness. These secular values are at root Christian values, but second order. They are a version of ‘Love thy neighbour’ but without the ‘Love God’ that in Christian theology gives love of neighbour its vitality. The secular concern for tolerance, for instance, is a

⁹ See National Secular Society “What is Secularism?” online at: <http://www.secularism.org.uk/what-is-secularism.html> (September 2014).

¹⁰ “Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labelled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be “tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine”, seems the only attitude [appropriate to] modern times. Yet [in this] we are building a dictatorship of relativism that recognizes nothing as definitive, and whose ultimate goal consists solely in one’s own ego and desires.

We, however, have a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism.” Benedict XVI *Mass Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice: Homily of Card. Joseph Ratzinger* *Vatican Radio*, 18 April 2005, [line at www.vatican.va/gpII/documents](http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents) (September 2014).

¹¹ See R. Fisichella *The New Evangelisation: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference* (Leominster, Gracewing: 2012), especially 25-48. Cf. P. Berger *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York, Doubleday: 1967).

Christian value, but, in a nominalist manner disconnected from belief and practice, it has become looser, softer, malleable, free-wheeling, expandable with new meaning, and indeed, ultimately permissive of what formerly would have deemed forbidden.

1.2 Secularisation

In Britain, secularism has been accompanied by secularisation, that is, the demise of Christianity. In the 2011 National Census, the number of those who self-identified as Christian is now just 59% of the population (3 in 5). This is a decline from 71% in 2001; by 2018, Christians will be in a minority.¹² 1 in 4 (25% of the population) are now 'nones;' they say they have no religion, up from 14% in 2001. Church-going, in continuous decline ever since records began in 1850, is now at a record low: only one in 25 people in England attend a church regularly, defined as once a month.¹³ Incidentally, Muslims are the next largest religious group, rapidly growing at 4.8% (up from 3% in 2001), then in order Hindus, Sikhs and Jews. Most Christians belong to the Church of England, whilst Catholics number about 5M or 8%.

Sociologists interpret this data variously. The classic view is called the 'secularisation paradigm.' It measures church attendance. Its thesis is that the number of people attending Sunday worship has been in continuous decline because the demise of religion is an inevitable consequence of modernity. As Steve Bruce argues, the more modern society becomes, the less religious people are.¹⁴ Callum Brown in *The Death of Christian Britain* accepts this but shows argues empirically that the catastrophic collapse in church membership really occurred in 1970s, after the '60s with their far-reaching cultural, social and sexual revolutions: youth-culture, the music of the Beatles (1962), the contraceptive pill, the legalisation of abortion and homosexuality (1967), the women's liberation movement (1968), easier divorce, and so on.¹⁵ The 'Swinging Sixties' brought about the collapse of the traditional family, a sexual revolution with new gender roles for women, who, Brown avers, in a family uphold religious traditions and moral values. Others, such as Grace Davie,¹⁶ agree with this but argue that while Christian practice has declined, Christian beliefs still remain extant, although increasingly unconventional. These beliefs surface on public occasions, at royal weddings, at baptisms and funerals, especially at the funerals of children. Such flowerings of religious sentiment, Davie argues, show the British to be 'unchurched' but not necessarily non-believers. They believe, but do not belong.

Some sociologists challenge the secularisation paradigm. Graeme Smith for instance argues that church-going is not the best nor the only measure of religiosity.¹⁷ Secularism, he says, is essentially Christian, as argued here, although for him, it is *not* a heresy; it is an entirely legitimate version of Christianity. It may be true that most

¹² See www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/index.html (September 2014).

¹³ See *Why Church: Belonging and Believing* at <http://www.whychurch.org.uk/trends.php> (September 2014).

¹⁴ See S. Bruce *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford, Blackwell: 2002).

¹⁵ C. Brown *The Death of Christian Britain* (London, Routledge: 2001).

¹⁶ G. Davie *Religion in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford, Blackwell: 1994).

¹⁷ G. Smith *A Short History of Secularism* (London, Tauris: 2010).

people do not attend church and do not believe in conventional Christian doctrines, but they do still believe in Christian ethics. Britain is a Christian ethics society and it is this that makes its culture Christian. Ethics is today's issue. This is evident in all the current debates about child-abuse, same-sex relationships and assisted suicide.

Another line of argument is that of Christopher Baker. Baker argues that whilst the forces of secularism are strong, even so, religion has not disappeared. Immigration has brought a renewed awareness of religion, particularly at local level. In any case, all humans are spiritual even if they choose not to practise a religion. The public square of the early 21C, he argues, is thus complex. Secularism may be strong in the public square, but there is also a new and growing concern with values, such as when parents choose which schools to send their children to or for ethical transparency in business and in debates about the regulation of the economy. Secularism cannot ground human values because it depletes what he calls 'spiritual capital,' the energy that motivates citizens to self-transcendence and community spirit. Consequently, Britain in his view is now becoming a post-secular society.¹⁸

1.3 Challenging the Secularists

As Catholics how should we respond to secularism? Where do we stand? What might we seek to do? We believe there *is* a God. He created the human race and guides it. He sent His Son as Saviour and Redeemer, to show us a truly human life. He sends His Holy Spirit into every heart and He has established the Church, with its Word and Sacraments, to be the instrument of His salvation.

It seems to me that we should develop three lines of response. First, we need to develop an apologetic against secularism itself. The British constitution and legal system has been moulded over many centuries by Christianity and the natural law. Today it is being crafted by lawmakers and politicians, educators and health-care professionals, pressure-groups and media, business and commercial interests, for whom those common, traditional values have less traction. Groups lobby for what they deem to be economic, expedient, tolerant, liberal, respectful, non-discriminatory, inclusive and sustainable, but essentially that which enables them to create a life-style they wish to pursue. Shorn from its Christian moorings, the law is now increasingly adrift. It expresses the will of the legislator, the will of the loudest and most emotionally powerful, the will of a policy unit or the will of the majority, and this relativism is State-supported. As Michael Nazir-Ali has argued, public ethics are now determined either by focus groups or by an authoritarian utilitarianism which threatens to enslave people, to undermine traditional family life and moral values, to strangle the rights of Christians, and most egregiously to victimise the weak, the unborn child, the elderly and the dying.¹⁹ Neil Addison notes how it used to be said that Britain is a free country, but in 'P-C' Britain, can that be said anymore? In reality, how free are we?²⁰

¹⁸ See J. Atherton, C. Baker and J. Reader *Christianity and the New Social Order*

¹⁹ M. Nazir-Ali *Triple Jeopardy for the West: Aggressive Secularism, Radical Islamism and Multiculturalism* (London, Bloomsbury: 2012) 32.

²⁰ See N. Addison *Religious Discrimination and Hatred Law* (London, Routledge Cavendish: 2006).

Secularism is too flimsy as a basis for modern society. It cannot guarantee human flourishing nor sustain long term the advances the British people have achieved: freedom of speech, freedom of political affiliation, respect for the rule of law, a strong sense of the individual's rights and duties, and equality.²¹ Instead, the more influential and widespread secularism becomes, the more it creates a society without foundations, one that develops randomly on the hoof through pressure-groups, legal precedent and political expediency. Its ring-fencing of religion to the private domain, its dissolution of the ground of ethics and the basis of law, its forgetfulness of the past and its Christian origins, its relativism that fosters harmful ideologies and leads to the victimization of the weak, its reduction of human knowing to scientific reasoning and the empirically demonstrable, its inability to support stable marriages and family life, its growing restrictions on religious freedom, and its slide towards greater surveillance and state-control, all suggest that something more is needed for a more solid basis. Indeed, it is exactly here that as Catholics we can argue that the Church has a crucial and therapeutic role, an 'anthropological mission.' The Church's task is prophetic: to proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ as the authentic way to human freedom and happiness. The Church has to demonstrate how Christianity, not secularism, is the guarantor of human flourishing. By offering an authentic humanism, Christianity alone is able to ground a free, democratic and pluralist society.

Secondly, we need more positively to promote and advertise the role of religion and its function in human living. The loss of faith is dissolving the foundations of ethics and this in turn will dissolve social cohesion.²² The emeritus Pope Benedict XVI has left a body of magisterium on this, not least the *Address to Politicians, Diplomats, Academics and Business Leaders at Westminster Hall* given in September 2010 during the papal visit to Britain, in which he argued directly against those who "advocate that the voice of religion be silenced."²³ Pope Francis has developed this further. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he unambiguously stated that religious freedom includes the

²¹ These qualities Pope Benedict highlighted in his Address in Westminster Hall: see *Faith Today. Special Papal Visit Souvenir Edition* 83

²² Interestingly, on a visit to the Vatican in 2012, Baroness Warsi, notably a Muslim, said that Europe needed to become more confident in its Christian identity in order to encourage a greater social cohesion:

"... [To] encourage social harmony, people need to feel stronger in their religious identities, more confident in their beliefs. ... Too often there is a suspicion of faith in our continent, where signs of religion cannot be displayed or worn in government buildings, where ... faith is sidelined, marginalised and downgraded. It all hinges on a basic misconception: That somehow to create equality and space for minority faiths and cultures, we need to erase our majority religious heritage."

(slightly adapted). See www.gov.uk/government/speeches/baroness-warsi-speech-in-the-holy-see (March 2014).

²³ For the text, see *Faith Today. Special Papal Visit Souvenir Edition* (Stoke on Trent, Alive Publishing: 2010) 82-87. In it, he said

"There are those who argue that the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas should be discouraged, in the questionable belief that it might somehow offend those of other religions or none. And there are those who argue – paradoxically with the intention of eliminating discrimination – that Christians in public roles should be required at times to act against their conscience. These are worrying signs of a failure to appreciate not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square."

freedom to manifest one's beliefs in public. A healthy pluralism, Francis says, that respects and values differences

“does not entail privatising religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques. This would represent, in effect, a new form of discrimination and authoritarianism. The respect due to the agnostic or non-believing minority should not be arbitrarily imposed in a way that silences the convictions of the believing majority or ignores the wealth of religious traditions.”²⁴

In other words, why should the views of secularists be imposed in a way that undermines the values of Britain's traditional Christian patrimony?

Thirdly, we need to strengthen the Christian patrimony on which our culture has been founded. Interestingly, after the papal visit, Benedict noted

“how strong the Christian heritage still is and how active it still is in social life at every level. British hearts and British lives are open to the reality of God and there were numerous expressions of religious feeling that my Visit made even more visible.”²⁵

Britain in his estimation was ripe for evangelisation. The visit had

“strengthened a deep conviction within me: the ancient nations of Europe have a Christian soul, which is one with the ‘genius’ and history of the respective peoples, and the Church [must] never stop working to keep this spiritual and cultural tradition ceaselessly alive.”

Spirituality and religion will never go away; the question of God is a spontaneous question for humans.²⁶ We need to rebut popular myths about science, so that schoolchildren especially can appreciate the interaction of faith and reason, the complementarity of religion and science, and the redemptive role of religion within human living. But above all, we need to identify, retrieve and develop Britain's Christian patrimony, its history, art and architecture, its music and literature, its liturgy, theology and ethics. Britain has been moulded over many centuries by Christian faith. We need to take the theological buzz-words of secularism and drive them back to their original values in the Bible and the Christian Tradition. In tracing the soft-values of secularism back to their Christian roots and exposing the ideologies that subvert those values, it will be important also to promote a greater knowledge of the Bible, which underpins so much of English literature, and the Bible stories that have inspired British culture and folklore. Moreover, it will be important too to promote a greater knowledge of the history of the Church in Britain, especially of the saints who helped to establish and develop the Christian character of these islands.

Lecture One: Conclusion and Discussion

²⁴ See Francis *Evangelii Gaudium. The Joy of the Gospel. Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (London, CTS: 2013) 255.

²⁵ Benedict XVI *General Audience Saint Peter's Square* on-line at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100922 (March 2014)

²⁶ See B. Lonergan *Method in Theology* (London, DLT: 1972) 101-103

Enough for now. In its two thousand year history, the Church has never before engaged with a secular culture. Inevitably, there will be an element of trial and error. The argument here is that despite positive features, secularism is too fragile a basis for a free society. We need an effective critique that promotes the role of religion and seeks to strengthen Britain's traditional Christian patrimony.

So to end with a brief discussion: How does secularism, if at all, impact upon your pastoral ministry as a priest? And how might you better respond?

2. LECTURE TWO: NEW EVANGELISATION

This second input is about the new evangelisation (NE). In my view NE is exactly the response to secularism that the Holy Spirit, these last three decades, has been calling us to. Three points: new evangelisation; some thoughts from *Evangelii Gaudium*, and then, our parishes.

2.1 New Evangelisation

One of the most significant developments *within* the Church since the Second Vatican Council has been the shift from a static, institutional model of being Church to a much more missionary-minded Evangelistic Catholicism. At the time of Vatican II, the key question was: What should the Church of God be like for the modern world? That question motivated many of the documents and discussions of the time and led to many reforms in Church life. Indeed, in the period up to 1975, the issue was *aggiornamento* ('updating'). It led to much internal change. But after the 1974 Synod on Evangelisation, and Paul VI's magnificent 1975 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, a change of focus began to arise and a new era of mission-mindedness. The new question in people's minds is: What is the Church for? What is her purpose in the world? This new awareness became central to the pontificate of John Paul II who spoke about evangelisation on all his world tours.

Essentially, evangelisation means spreading the Good News, witnessing to the Gospel, proclaiming the *kerygma* of the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a unending activity, and, importantly, one that is two-way: it is about *ourselves* being constantly evangelised, as well as ourselves constantly evangelising others. This two-way mission has been operative since the Lord's Ascension, when he told us to "go; make disciples of all the nations; baptise them ... and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" (Mt 28: 19-20). But in 1983, in an address in Latin America, JP2 suddenly used the term 'new evangelisation' (NE): we need an evangelisation "new in its ardour, new in its methods and new in its expression."²⁷

²⁷ See John Paul II "The Task of the Latin American Bishop" in *Origins* 12 (March 24, 1983): 659-62. The occasion was a discourse to an assembly of CELAM in Port-au-Prince on 9th March 1983. Cf. R. Fisichella *The New Evangelisation* (Gracewing, Leominster: 2012) 8f

Until then, evangelisation had meant two things: (1) first proclamation, the initial presentation of the Gospel to rouse faith; and (2) on-going catechesis, a life-long insertion into the life of the Church through Catholic schooling, involvement in parish life, Mass and the sacraments, preaching, taking part in charitable activities, and so on. But now with a new culture, a new form of evangelisation is needed. The two-staged process of first proclamation and on-going catechesis is no longer working. Today, many people know the basic elements of Christianity but they find it irrelevant or it does not affect them or move them. They may have been baptised, but they drift away or never practice the Faith. They are sacramentalised but not evangelized. As ‘nonpractising Catholics,’ they might be connected with the school, but they are not, or not yet, in a real, living relationship with Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. If the Gospel message is to be communicated effectively in the new secular culture, then new methods, new expressions, new media, new means of evangelisation are required.

Yet the term NE means more than new methods and new expressions. St. John Paul spoke of a ‘new ardour.’ In this sense, NE means a return to the original experience of faith, a transforming encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour, with a renewed sense of being called to discipleship within His Body, the Church. St. Paul said, “life to me is Christ” (Phil 1: 21); the “life I live now in this body I live in faith, faith in the Son of God, who loved me and who sacrificed Himself for my sake” (Gal 2: 20). As St. Bernadine of Siena says, the “Catholic Faith consists in *knowing Jesus Christ* and receiving illumination from Him.”²⁸ NE is about the centrality of the Person of Christ, about discipleship of Him, with a new desire to invite others into a transforming relationship with Him. NE is not a scheme or programme. As JP2 said:

“We are certainly 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!”²⁹

So not a programme but a Person, Jesus Christ. It is He who enkindles the new ardour.

For many Catholics today, this implies a massive attitudinal shift from ecclesio-centrism to Christo-centrism. It is easy to talk about the Church and its institutions, but not about the reality and experience upon which faith is based. The institutional often overshadows the spiritual. In the past, great emphasis was laid on building up the Church, on the parish, on lay ministries and structures. Clergy became ‘chaplains to the Catholic community’ and the faithful ‘consumers of spiritual goods,’ with parishes focused on meeting parishioners’ needs. NE, however, means a shift of focus back from the Church of the Lord to the Lord of the Church and from the Church’s internal life to her apostolate in the world. Everyone is called to be a missionary-disciple, with the clergy as mission-directors, offering leadership, formation and support. Clergy numerically make up less than 0.1% of a diocese; this is about the

²⁸ *Sermo 49, art. 1: Opera Omnia IV, 495.* Extract from the Divine Office, Office of Readings for the optional memorial of The Most Holy Name of Jesus (3rd January) in *ICEL The Liturgy of the Hours Supplement (Grey Book) Optional and Obligatory Memorials added to the General Roman Calendar from 1984 to 2004* (Washington, April 2014)

²⁹ John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 29 (London, CTS: 2000)

laity. As JP2 once said, there needs to be a recovery of the secular nature of the mission of the laity.³⁰ The laity must witness in the world so that everyone might have a chance to hear the Gospel, to come to faith and to receive salvation.³¹

Two elements foster NE. The first is prayer and spirituality, a transforming inward experience of God's love and salvation. All the resources of the Church, the diocese and the parish need to be put at the service of helping people to pray, to find God, to experience the love of God, to commit to God, to learn the art of praying, to develop a personal-passionate friendship with Jesus Christ, to grasp the meaning of His death and resurrection, and to have a sense of being chosen by Him personally as disciple. Catholics have huge resources for this in two millennia of spiritual theology, in the wisdom and lives of the saints, and in a rich, profound and diverse Catholic Tradition.

A second element fostering NE is identifying and releasing charisms and gifts. Ways need to be found to help each individual member of the Church reflect on their relationship with God, to have a stronger sense of the centrality of Christ in their lives, to become an intentional or missionary disciple, and to discern the gifts, talents and charisms the Holy Spirit has given them for mission and service. The aim here is not an institution-led approach – discerning who might be called, say, to run Children's Liturgy - but rather a person-centred approach that identifies and releases the gifts of each disciple for missionary-service in the world, at home, at work, at play.

2.2 *Evangelii Gaudium*

A magnificent reference text on NE is *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis from the 2012 Synod on NE.³² In it, Francis explores how a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in the Church is a cause of joy such that it naturally drives people out to evangelise others. *Evangelii Gaudium* is a particularly rich resource for parish life. After its promulgation, I issued a Pastoral Message to the Diocese to highlight some key points.³³

³⁰ See John Paul II *Christifideles Laici* 15 (London, CTS: 1998). Cf. Congregation for the Clergy *Instruction on Certain Questions regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest* (Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 1997) p. 7

³¹ The role of the laity in the Church's mission is paramount. *Lumen Gentium* notes how it is the laity's "special vocation . . . to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. . . . There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. . . . It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer" (LG 31). This task is not for the clergy. Only the laity, because of their skills in the world, culture and everyday life, can do this. As the Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* puts it: "the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which one lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed properly by others" (AA 13).

³² For text, see Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel* (London, CTS: 2013). For the 58 Propositions promulgated by the 2012 Synod see Synodus Episcoporum of the Synod of Bishops *The New Evangelization for the* Bulletin: XIII Ord. General Assembly *Transmission of the Christian Faith* online at www.vatican.va (January 2015)

³³ See www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

I first invited clergy and people to ask themselves: Who are the poor in our neighbourhood? What is the meaning of 'poverty' in our local context, our parish? What strategies of assistance and support might we put in place for those in need?

I also asked everyone to reflect on how their parish might become more effectively an evangelising community. In Paragraph 28, Francis says that the parish

“is not an outdated institution ...[It] possesses great flexibility. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities, the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelisers.”

I then asked everyone to respond to Pope Francis’s call to keep churches open. The Church, he said

“is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door" (47).

In the Pastoral Message, I said:

“In the Diocese of Portsmouth, I once again urge everyone: keep your church open! Visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament! Adore Him and come away renewed, sharing your love and happiness with others!”

The total population served by the Diocese of Portsmouth is 3M; there are 200,000 Catholics, of which 40,000 practice. This means motivating the 40,000 to become missionaries to the 160,000 non-practising and the 2.8M others. The question is: Is my parish community inward-looking or outward-looking? Is it in maintenance-mode or mission-mode? Is it always the same people at Mass, or do parishioners often bring new people, friends and neighbours? Is everyone getting old, or are there lots of youngsters? Is the focus on protecting the community, the holy-huddle, or is it on reaching out to the wider world, the lost, the non-churchgoing?

In *Evangelii Gaudium* 27, Francis speaks of making the Church’s structures more mission-oriented. After Vatican II, the Church proposed at many levels committees and pastoral councils in which laity and clergy would collaborate. But in the Western world, the culture of councils and committees often borrows unwittingly from business practice or from democratic models, and these easily lead to factions and friction or an inward-looking bureaucratic mentality. At a time of perceived clergy shortage, dioceses have focused attention on involving laity in the day-to-day pastoral ministry of the Church. Many have employed lay administrators and pastoral workers, such as chaplains and youth ministers. All these developments are laudable, yet the primary vocation of the laity, as *Lumen Gentium* 31 states, is to “seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will”. We need to develop supports for the laity in their primary mission to the world.

Two concrete examples. First, the Diocese of Portsmouth has 23 local clusters of parishes and each pastoral area has a Pastoral Council. At the moment, we are asking the pastoral areas to replace their Pastoral Councils with a new model, the Evangelisation Strategy Team. The Strategy Team comprises clergy plus a representative spread of the faithful: young, middle, wise and seasoned, a teacher from school and a religious. Care has to be taken not to enlist ‘bruised apples’ or people with strong agendas, but people willing to work together as a team. The Team’s purpose is not to administer, discuss minutes or organise Readers rotas, but to dream the dream, to think outside the box, to enable and sponsor simple, do-able mission-projects. This requires assessing the area, its situation and needs, a grasp of what is happening already, an identification of priorities and resources needed. Perhaps a parish has many young families: What about organising a family picnic day? Or a lot of retirement homes: Could a young visiting group be set up? Or inactive Catholics: Could new media be used? Or keeping the church open for prayer and Eucharistic adoration, devising a leaflet with Mass times for a new housing development, running a ‘Theology on Tap’ session in a local pub, or having a stall on a Christmas Market? There can be lots of ideas and new strategies to help re-present the Gospel, meeting people where they are and proposing to them, in a new context and in an unexpected way, the Good News of Christ, the Church’s message, the offer of salvation.

A second example from the Diocese of Portsmouth is that we have just re-established deaneries, eight clusters of pastoral areas. This is not about bureaucracy, but to respond to the mission needs of a whole region. In his 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul spoke of evangelising *areopagi*.³⁴ The Areopagus was a hill in ancient Athens where civic magistrates and religious leaders gathered. In Acts 17, St. Paul wandered around the Areopagus and saw the various statues, including one *To an Unknown God*. He was then able to proclaim the Gospel: ‘What you worship as Unknown I proclaim to you.’ We might note, most of the intelligentsia laughed at him, but some did listen and wanted to hear more.³⁵ Today, the task is to identify local and regional *areopagi*, the crossroads, market squares, meeting places, centres and cultural sectors where people gather, work or pass through. Examples include hospitals, medical centres and care homes; schools, colleges and universities; the regional and local TV and news media; Young Offender institutions, immigration and detention centres; sporting venues; shopping malls; libraries; housing developments; transport nodes (stations, ports and airports); hotels and conference facilities; business and industrial complexes. Other *areopagi* include ethnic communities, interreligious dialogue, and relationships with civic leaders and local government. How can the Catholic Church be present in these *areopagi*? How can the Church evangelise? How can the Church serve people’s needs, especially the poor and those in difficulty?

An example of a huge *areopagus* is the new Reading station with its extra 8 platforms. It has an annual footfall of 20M passengers. Is there anything the Church can do to

³⁴ See John Paul II *Redemptoris Missio. On The Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*

(London, CTS: 1990) 37

³⁵ See Acts 17: 23 and 32-34.

engage with it? Could there be a chaplaincy or a leaflet? There are also hundreds of staff working in the station and the depots. What is being done for them? Surely there are Catholics among them to be networked? Are there not other Christians, people of religion and people of good will? *Evangelii Gaudium* urges us to go out onto the margins, proclaiming the Gospel, reaching out person to person to the most needy. In many of these cases, it is possible to act ecumenically or interreligiously.

2.3 The Parish

To finish with a words about the parish. Today the parish is in crisis. People live extremely busy lives and faith becomes like a hobby. For many Mass is another activity to be fitted in. Rather than weekly, many Catholics now practice when they can, once a month. The territorial parish with its clergy thus have fewer claims on their affiliation. People use the parish as required, for a funeral or a baptism. They are also discerning customers. In urban contexts, they shop around for the type of Mass they prefer, at the time that suits their schedule and for the priest they like.

It seems to me we need to envisage the parish today more as a chaplaincy-centre than a static community. Traditionally, pastors have placed great emphasis on forming community, on building the parish-family, on pastoral care. This is a solid foundation, since today many have a real need to belong. Yet in the call to NE, parishes must also be open, outgoing, inviting, serving the needy and this is where the chaplaincy model is helpful. Chaplaincies are places where people drop in, pass through, move on. They see themselves not as an end but as a means. They are staging posts on life's journey, multi-ethnic people-places that exist to serve, enable, facilitate. They operate in contexts. Think of a university chaplaincy. University chaplaincies build up core teams of people. They become centres of sacramental refreshment, agencies of doctrinal, moral and spiritual formation, places of discussion yet places for support and counselling. University chaplaincies are open all hours, not just on Sunday. They enable overseas students to feel at home. For a parish this would have many implications, not least for the way its property is used. Adequate parking and easy access would help. Again, the community facility might benefit from a "Starbucks makeover", a relaxed lounge area with good coffee, tea, cakes, wi-fi, books to read and buy. Again, provision needs to be made for small-group facilities with modern technology, for counselling and for formation rooms. Above all, the chaplaincy-parish must be a power-house of constant prayer and an engine-room of service to the needy.

Chaplaincies are not only for Catholics, although in the first place they are directed to Catholics. Think of a hospital chaplaincy. The Catholic chaplain serves the needs of Catholic patients. Yet chaplaincy services operate in a collaborative context at once ecumenical, interreligious and secular. The services offered are not limited to Catholics but to anyone of good will, seeking them. This is exactly the scope of NE, the Church on mission to all. This could offer a model for a parish.

Recently, there has been much new literature on the parish in the light of NE. Mention should be made of the outstanding work of Sherry Weddell and the Catherine of Siena

Institute, Colorado Springs, especially her 2012 *Forming Intentional Disciples*.³⁶ Also, the writings of the Maryland parish priest, Fr. Michael White and his lay associate, Tom Corcoran in *Rebuilt: The Story of a Catholic Parish* and its sequel *Tools for Rebuilding: 75 Practical Ways to Make Your Parish Better*, both published in 2013. Meanwhile, in his excellent *Divine Renovation: Bringing your Parish from Maintenance to Mission*, Fr. James Mallon suggests parishes review their budgets, to evaluate whether resources are used more on property or more on mission-projects.³⁷ He suggests ten areas that a parish in the context of NE should consider: prioritising the weekend, reviewing hospitality teams, investing in a first-class music ministry from Latin plainchant to contemporary worship, homilies and visual aids, building a meaningful community that rejects what he calls ‘anonymous Christianity,’ setting clear expectations for parishioners, identifying gifts and charisms, creating smaller communities within the larger community, having trust in the action of the Holy Spirit and building an inviting church in which occasional attenders are made welcome.

Speaking as a former parish priest, I would say the sacraments present a huge opportunity for evangelisation, when people come to request baptism, First Holy Communion, confirmation, marriage, funerals and in sickness. Traditionally the emphasis has been on catechesis, but today these encounters in the ‘chaplaincy-parish’ are more about primary proclamation. People need ‘words,’ but ‘religion’ even more. New methods need to be found to enkindle the religious sense, to enable people to encounter Christ, to help them meet Him in the Gospels and in the Blessed Sacrament.

On the other hand, any priest or Strategy Team taking forward the NE in a parish needs to be ready for opposition. Think of the criticism Jesus faced from the scribes, who said Beelzebul was in Him; even his own relatives thought He was out of His mind (Mk 3: 20-35). From personal experience, the most challenging criticism comes from some of those who were young adults in the 1960s. Inhabiting an ecclesio-centric world, they can be highly critical of traditional Catholic teaching and authority, particularly on morals. They often resist innovations in the liturgy, especially if they fail to fit a 1970s stereotype. NE requires strong faith and a vision not to be deflected, but also charity and patience with critics. Feedback is always welcome, even if formulaic, since there is often much to learn from it.

Lecture Two: Conclusion and Discussion

To sum up this second input. We have discussed NE as a God-given response to the challenge of living and working as Catholics in a secular culture. We referred to *Evangelii Gaudium* and looked at how we visualise our parish.

³⁶ S. Weddell *Forming Intentional Disciples. The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington, Our Sunday Visitor: 2012). Cf. M. Sweeney and S. Weddell *The Parish: Mission or Maintenance* (Colorado Springs, Catherine of Siena Institute: 2000) and S. Weddell *Making Disciples; Equipping Apostles* (Colorado Springs, Catherine of Siena Institute: 2000)

³⁷ See J. Mallon *Divine Renovation: Bringing your Parish from Maintenance to Mission* (New London CT, Twenty-Third Publications: 2014).

To end with a brief discussion: How far has your community taken to heart the call to NE? And as a pastor, in what ways might you become less a chaplain to the Catholic community and more a director of a band of missionary-disciples?

LECTURE THREE: BEING A PRIEST WITHIN A SECULAR CULTURE

This morning, we discussed what we meant by a secular culture and then went on to consider the NE. This afternoon, I want to explore further the impact of secularism on Catholics themselves and then discuss our own personal response as priests.

3.1 Intentional Discipleship

As diocesan priests, one of our greatest concerns is practice. In all the parishes and contexts in which I have laboured, a primary concern has been the decline in practice and how to reach out to and re-engage the nonpractising. In the last 30 years, there has been a massive decline in the number of practising Catholics, in Mass attendance, in marriages and in vocations. There are 5.5M Catholics in the UK but now only 10-15% regularly attend Mass. Since 1985, practise in the Diocese of Portsmouth has declined from over 75,000 to 40,000. Many have never practised; some drift away; others adhere lightly to their faith, without a real relationship with Jesus. We have an extensive network of Catholic schools, yet few youngsters and few of their families practice. It is hard to find Catholic teachers and many of those we have, with notable exceptions, are lightly evangelised. Religious life has declined and the 19C religious communities of brothers and sisters have all but disappeared, whilst in many dioceses, there is a chronic shortage of priests with parishes being clustered or closed. Whatever the measure you choose, the Church in Britain is in crisis.

On the other hand, numbers are not everything. In the Gospels, Jesus uses images for the Church such as a city on a hilltop, a lamp on the lampstand, a leaven in the dough, suggesting he envisaged a small band, a faithful remnant, a tiny flock.³⁸ He never promised full churches: 'Build a church and I will fill it.' Secularism presents the Church with a huge challenge, akin to that the Early Church faced when engaging with the pagan Roman Empire, although the nature of this challenge is essentially different. As priests, it can sometimes seem as if we are flogging a dead horse. Yet we know that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and that He is with us.³⁹ We also know that the Holy Spirit is at this very moment at work in people's hearts wooing them towards Christ and His Church. When the going gets tough, it is important to remember it is not the product on offer that is defective but the ability of people in our busy, secular consumer-culture to hear and receive it.

In *Forming Intentional Disciples*, Sherry Weddell argues that God no longer has grandchildren: the era of the mass-appeal cultural Catholicism of the past is now

³⁸ See Mat 5: 14; Mat 5: 15 and Mat 13: 33

³⁹ John 14: 6 and Mat 28: 20

dead.⁴⁰ The vast majority of baptised Catholics do not practice, and over half of these no longer identify themselves as Catholic. Interestingly, a number of ex-Catholics convert to Evangelicalism, especially those of ethnic origin such as the Portuguese and Nigerians. Research shows that they convert not because of a disagreement with Church teaching, or the clergy abuse-crisis or a marriage issue, but, surprisingly, because their spiritual needs are not being met. It is not the freer or more upbeat style of Protestant worship that attracts; the reasons go deeper. What she says is staggering. Weddell claims that over 40% of practising Catholics say they do not have a personal relationship with God. A large number do not believe in a loving, personal God with whom they can have a life-changing relationship: this despite going to Mass, being involved in the Church, even working in the parish office. In any parish, she says, the number of motivated, ‘intentional’ disciples is roughly about 5%, the same few who turn up to everything.

Weddell offers strategies for opening up evangelistic conversations about faith, God and religion. There are five thresholds or stages of conversion a convert goes through. The first level is trust: Do I like this person, this priest, this catechist? Trust leads to curiosity: What makes him or her tick? Do they really believe it all? Curiosity leads to spiritual openness, an openness to the possibility that they might change their own position. The fourth threshold is spiritual seeking, where the enquirer actively seeks to know what the Catholic Church teaches. The Fifth threshold is intentional discipleship, when a person enters into friendship with Jesus Christ and gives themselves to Him in discipleship.⁴¹ Weddell uses the phrase ‘intentional discipleship’ to mean being a Christian not just because I am a cradle Catholic, but because I have wilfully and intentionally chosen to give my life to Jesus and His Church. Weddell suggests that many Catholics have an ability to talk about church matters but an inability to speak about faith-matters, even those involved in RCIA, First Communion and other sacramental programmes. People comfortably talk about the Church, about the teachings and practices of the Church, about morality but not about what is absolutely essential: Jesus Christ, the Gospel, the kerygma, salvation, being a disciple. We so often assume that everyone knows this, and that all this is in place underneath. Yet maybe it isn’t? Do our people believe in a personal God? Do they know he loves them? Do they know what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means for them? Do they live their lives in day to day union with Christ asking His direction? It is only when these ‘basics’ are in place that the rest of the ‘Catholic thing’ follows on.

If Weddell is correct, then surely the time has come to put all the Church’s resources and all our own resources at the service of the kerygma, of helping people to pray, to find God, to have a sense of God in their life, to connect with God, to commit to God, to learn the art of praying to God, to develop a real, personal-passionate relationship with Jesus Christ, to appropriate personally the death and resurrection of Jesus, to acquire a strong sense of what it means to be chosen by him as his disciple: “You did not choose me; no, I chose you, and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last” (John 15: 16). This is not a matter of publishing lots of prayers and

⁴⁰ S. Weddell *Forming Intentional Disciples* 15-47.

⁴¹ S. Weddell *Forming Intentional Disciples* 128-130.

readings for people to say, but about something much more fundamental: real religion, the experience of God's love in Jesus Christ. I remember as VG, just before coming to Portsmouth, visiting a priest in hospital and at the end of the visit, suggesting we said a prayer. "No thanks," he said, "We don't need to! I'm not that ill!"

To live as Christians in a secular culture means that there will inevitably be an opposition within us between faith and culture. To be a disciple of Christ in a secular culture is to live a tension between faith and culture that goes on in heart, mind and life, a tension between an intentional faith in Jesus Christ, the Catholic Tradition, and a secular way of life based on sets of meanings and values often compatible, sometimes subtly divergent, occasionally radically different. Secular values may be Christian in origin, but often reverse or revise their Christian pedigree. Each Christian must therefore not only seek to know and understand their faith but also to know and understand contemporary culture with its ebb and flow: the 21C with its dazzling scientific and technological advances yet with its attendant economic, political and social turmoil. Every day a process of careful discernment is needed if the right choices are to be made.

3.2 Priestly Spirituality

The secular priest lives this tension more sharply than any other member of the Church: *in* the world but not *of* it. People expect of their priests a father-figure, full of charity yet professional, transparent of Christ and authentic as a son of the Church. As priests, we have to be what we are meant to be and in some way to reflect in my personality, words and actions, the Person of Jesus Christ the High Priest.

There are some personal practices I have found helpful in my own life that I would like to share with you. First, Eucharistic Adoration. In the seminary, we were often told to spend an hour a day in prayer, but it has only been in the last decades I have discovered the importance of this, especially Eucharistic Adoration: spending time, every day, with Jesus our Lord and Saviour. He has called us to follow Him, to be His priest, to be united with His Sacred Heart. Adoration here does not imply Benediction too. Adoration without Benediction is mainly a postconciliar development. The arrangements need not be elaborate: exposing the Blessed Sacrament in a simple way, with a couple of candles and, maybe, a censer burning.

In the parish, weekday Mass was usually at 9.15 am, but 7.30 pm on Wednesday. Before each Mass, I instituted an hour of Adoration, ending with Morning or Evening Prayer. We also had an hour before the Saturday evening Vigil Mass, and before 9.00 am Mass on Sunday. People did not come in droves, but some came; they turned up early for Mass. It brought a different quality to the church, even to the building. People would say: What a prayerful church! In Bishops House we have Adoration each morning first thing: together with Mass, it is the best part of the day. I've tried praying at other times during the day, but I come back time and again to the conviction that it has to be first thing. In Eucharistic Adoration, we do not only adore the Lord; He our Creator adores us His creation. I often find myself with 1,001

distractions, things I need to do, people to phone, emails to answer. So I keep at hand a small notebook to write things down, so as to discharge them from my mind.

It seems to me there is no alternative to Eucharistic Adoration if we want to build up a real friendship with Jesus. If *we* have faith, then the people will catch it too. Practically, to encourage people to develop their own prayer-life, we need to keep our churches open so they can visit the Lord. I passed on to our priests the advice from the diocesan insurers: that with prudent measures, it is actually safer to keep the churches open than to keep them locked. Consequently, I have asked that unless there is a good reason to the contrary, every church in the Diocese of Portsmouth should be kept open for prayer, at least during daylight hours. We might also provide leaflets to help people pray. We could organise retreats, classes or lessons on prayer, on how to pray, on meditation, on *lectio divina* and on other techniques to help people encounter the Lord. By enabling this, we enable them to meet Jesus and thus to become intentional disciples: people who choose to love Jesus, who choose to be His friend and disciple, who choose to serve Him and to give their lives to Him. If we love the Lord, they will too.

Secondly, confession and spiritual direction. The fact that only a few nowadays make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is indicative of the depth of the crisis and spiritual malaise within the Catholic community. In visitations, I now ask the average number of confessions heard per week. As a child, I can just remember long lines awaiting confession, then in the 1970s experiments with General Absolution that were supposed to bring all the lapsed back. Here we mean a regular one-to-one, a personal, healing encounter with Jesus, the reality-check of frequent confession, and the simple, spiritual direction that goes with it. It is different, however, with the young. They seem to understand instinctively the need for confession, especially when organised in school in Lent. But here we mean adults, and above all, we priests. I fear that one of the reasons for the decline is the fact that priests no longer go. It goes without saying each one of us should have a spiritual director and confessor to help us develop our relationship with God. Ideally, as clergy we would go to confession weekly or fortnightly, although realistically, once a month would be good habit.

Thirdly, let me mention the Divine Office, which brings the grace of the Mass into the various hours of the day. Since leaving seminary, no doubt to the chagrin of the liturgists who taught me, I do find it hard to say the Offices at their allotted Hours. Life is too busy or distracted. Often as priests we say to people: I'll pray for you, or I'll remember your loved ones in my prayers. The Office is exactly the forum for this. I might also suggest that in Advent or Lent, it is worth rereading the magnificent introduction to the *Liturgy to the Hours* at the front of the Breviary. It contains rich teaching on the nature of prayer and its power, and on the psalms.

A fourth help is the Rosary. I've tried hard over the years to say the Rosary each day. To me, the Rosary is best recited with another person, or alone if out for a walk. Most helpful for me is a CD I keep in the car. Last Christmas, with the Rosary Group from St. Peter's School Bournemouth, we recorded a CD of the rosary and ran off 25,000

copies for distribution free across the diocese. I now frequently meet people in the parishes who use it when travelling and they thank me for it.

Earlier today, I proposed the best response to today's secular culture is what the Holy Spirit is calling us to: NE. NE is an evangelisation as JP2 said "new in its ardour, new in its methods and new in its expression." The proposal here is that as priests, in our leadership role, what is critically important is our own *ardour*, not what we do but who we are, so that by sensing the depth, the fervour, the passion of our own personal relationship with Jesus, the faithful will be inspired and led to deepen their own friendship with him. In this, we will need to teach people how to pray.

Fifthly, study is important, and this in two senses. First, spiritual reading, particularly the Gospels, but also other writings that nourish mind and heart, and help us deepen our faith and ardour. It is good to keep abreast of recent magisterium such as the excellent *Homiletics Directory* which has just been published by the CDW.⁴² Very helpful too are books on the priesthood. Recently I read Tom McGovern's *Generations of Priests*.⁴³ He takes ten great priests from Church history, from St. John Chrysostom to Pope John Paul II, giving a short biography of each that is both realistic and inspiring.

The other aspect of study is the culture we live in, especially the latest music, films, TV, the arts, fashions, developments in science and technology, economics and social trends. We need to read a newspaper. In the Middle Ages, the whole culture was baptised with theology the queen of the sciences. Today vast swathes of contemporary culture are unevangelised. This is a task for the Church as a whole. In the Diocese of Portsmouth, we have been looking at a number of initiatives in this regard: a NE Team to sponsor projects, a Social Research Unit to monitor and assess demographic and other trends, a commission for Justice, Peace and Social Responsibility, a Dialogue with Cultural Sectors Group, a Court of the Gentiles based on Catholic Social Teaching to bring together peoples of good will for common action, and a Civic Relations team.⁴⁴ But on a personal level, I would see the role of the priest today as a kind of 'sentinel.' Sentinels stand high up on the parapet: they look out for their people; they are like watchmen who foresee the dangers ahead but also opportunities. This to me is a splendid image for the priest in a secular culture: a sentinel.

Study days such as this can be helpful. Every year, we ought to do three or four days of formation, with a couple of Days of Recollection in preparation for Lent and Advent. We should also undertake an annual Retreat, a week organised by others or by oneself. This is in addition to a weekly free day, and our usual annual leave.

A sixth help as a priest in a secular culture is our friends. It is really important we support each other, that we have good friendships, and good priest friends. I thank

⁴² Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments *Homiletic Directory* (London, CTS: 2015)

⁴³ T. McGovern *Generations of Priests* (Dublin, Four Courts Press: 2010)

⁴⁴ For more on this and the *Framework for Collaboration*, see the Diocesan website.

God for some wonderful and incredibly funny priest-friends! It is also good to belong to a support-group such as Jesus Caritas or Ministry to Priests. The new movements in the Church focus on prayer, formation and friendship. Those components form a good formula for us. In Shrewsbury Diocese 20 years ago, they established Ministry to Priests and most joined support groups, some of which still continue. Our Travel Group still meets: it's really a pub-crawl round Cheshire and Shropshire. (One group was called the Homily Group, the idea being you tried out your best homilies on the others. Unsurprisingly, that group folded after its first meeting!)

The last thing to mention is attitude. My father - God rest him - an ordinary Catholic, loved Pope Francis: his big smile, his chatty humanity, his down-to earth approach, his concern for the poor. Francis radiates people-skills. As priests our attitude towards people in today's secular culture is critical. God forgive me for the times I have been impatient with people or unapproachably busy: they never forget it. People do treat us badly at times; they misuse the Church; in some parishes there are people just waiting for us to put a foot wrong. Yet the Jesus we love in the Eucharist IS the Jesus we love in the poor and needy. I am not suggesting that every time the doorbell rings we think: That's the Blessed Sacrament calling! But how often we hear of a young couple, wanting to get married, being put off for some reason by a priest. As a priest, yes, I'm often inwardly horrified at how little people seem to know about the basics of the Catholic Faith, and how this one or that one has never darkened the door of a church for years. People abuse us and criticise us. They can be love-less and grumbling. We need to stand our ground but to do so with great love and patience. A smile can change things. A bit of humour is the equivalent of breathing through your mouth.

I am sorry these seven suggested helps for living as a priest within a secular culture are very simple. I know many of you are much holier and you could add numerous tips yourselves.

Lecture Three: Conclusion and Discussion

Here, though, to conclude. Secularism presents the Church with a huge challenge, and it can often seem, as clergy, we are climbing a huge mountain and 'flogging a dead horse.' At the episcopal ordination, I asked everyone to pray that as a bishop I would be humble and holy, orthodox, creative and courageous. The blogosphere heard only one of those qualities. Yet as priests we need all five. I do not believe that the only way to face secularism is to have more traditionalism, although we certainly need all the riches of our Catholic Tradition. We do need to be literally 'orthodox', authentic, for only the Truth can set us free. But I don't believe either that the Church today will be saved by *sola structura*: change the structures and all will be well. Surely what we need, besides humility and holiness, is creativity. We need to be truly innovative, flexible, bold and courageous. We need enormous creativity if we are to communicate imaginatively and attractively the Person of Jesus Christ to the peoples of 21C.

In *Redemptoris Missio*, St. John Paul II said:

“If we look at today's world, we are struck by many negative factors that can lead to pessimism. But this feeling is unjustified: we have faith in God our Father and Lord, in his goodness and mercy. As the third millennium of the redemption draws near, God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity, and we can already see its first signs.”⁴⁵

That new springtime of opportunity is now very evident. Already the Spirit is at work in the heart of every child, woman and man, wooing them towards full communion with Christ and His Church. Already genuine creativity is occasioning great developments. Already, people are coming forward, desiring change and placing themselves at Christ's service. So *Duc in altum!* Let us put out into the deep. Let us pay out the nets for a catch (Luke 5: 4)! Let us pray today, for ourselves, for our dioceses, for whole the Church in England and Wales. Let us pray for an even greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit that everyone may find in the Heart of Christ that true, genuine, lasting human happiness and fulfilment for which deep-down they long.

Thank you for listening today.

To end with a brief discussion. What most helps me as priest to live in a secular culture? What other helps might there be?

⁴⁵ *Redemptoris Missio* 86