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and  
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## The Great Reset and Synodality in the Church

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It has been a recurring theme in Church history that periods of profound turbulence and almost insurmountable challenges to the Christian way of life have surfaced. The Catholic Church in Ireland is now embarking on a ‘synodal pathway’ to address the prevailing downward trends in religious participation in the aftermath of Vatican II. Current experience indicates two divergent paths. The first path is to adapt Christ’s message to suit the herd mentality of the day which chooses to reject traditional thinking. Christian doctrine in this approach, must be stripped down to what is acceptable to the present generation. This was foretold by Fulton Sheen in his prophetic utterances in 1947 when he spoke about the emergence of a ‘new church’, which he described as the ‘ape’ of the traditional church due to its parasitic nature.<sup>1</sup> The second and alternative path is the traditional one that challenges each generation to bring to life the message of Christ

1 J. Pronechen interview in 2019 regarding the Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen’s revelations in 1947 about the future of the Church. <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/fulton-sheen>.: see also Fulton J. Sheen, ‘*Communism and the Conscience of the West*’, Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, (1948) and V.J. McBrierty and D.M.D. Murphy, ‘*The Church in Crisis: the Prophetic Dimension*’, The Furrow, LXXIII, No.2 (2022). pp.106-111.

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in changing times, always remaining faithful to traditional dogma as handed down by the Apostles. As Pope Benedict XVI pointed out: ‘The future of the Church can and will issue from those whose roots are deep and who live from the pure fulness of their faith. ... and it will not issue from those who accommodate themselves merely to the passing moment.’<sup>2</sup> It is the traditional route that is adopted herein, mindful of the formidable challenges presented by the unrelenting change in society which, as R. Ludlum reminds us, is ‘another area of human endeavour that is both an art *and* a science, and, it too, is all around us – either enriching our lives or destroying them.’<sup>3</sup>

Any meaningful way forward must take account of a number of fundamental issues: (i) The current global crisis, fueled by the Covid-19 pandemic, which is all-embracing in its impact on the individual, on social and moral values, and on national and global governance; (ii) the institutional church which must review its internal administration involving clerical and lay participation, ever mindful of its core pastoral mission as defined in fundamental Christian dogma; and (iii) the inter-relationship between Church and State as laid down in the Compendium of Christian Doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

In plotting the way forward, there is much to be learned from those timeless lessons of history that can provide meaningful guidance and perspective in addressing these challenges.

*The Current Global Crisis:* In today’s cyber-controlled world two developments in particular stand out, namely, the ‘*New World Order*’ promoted by the World Economic Forum during their deliberations in Davos, Switzerland in 2020;<sup>5</sup> and the challenging insight of a significant and controversial participant at the 18<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club at Sochi in October 2021.<sup>6</sup>

The ‘*New World Order*’, masterminded and funded by the élite of the world’s economic community, vigorously promotes global solidarity, wholly secular in its approach, devoid of any spiritual or religious dimension. Subsequent examination of these developments revealed many disturbing aspects, not least

2 Cardinal Ratzinger, in conversation with The Patrick Madrid. (1969) <https://youtu.be/1f1dWbn3lgl>

3 R. Ludlum. ‘*Trevaayne*’, Bantam Books, Jan., 1973.

4 ‘*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*’. To His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Master of Social Doctrine and Evangelical Witness to Justice and Peace (2004).

5 ‘*The Great Reset*’ is the name of the 50th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum held in June 2020. Proceedings were authored and published by Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret in ‘*Covid 19-The Great Reset*’, Forum Publications, July 19, 2020.

6 The Valdai International Discussion Club in Soshi, Russia, (2021). [www.frontiere.eu/valdai-club-meeting-2021-president-putin-on-values-and-state-27/10/2021](http://www.frontiere.eu/valdai-club-meeting-2021-president-putin-on-values-and-state-27/10/2021).

of which the erosion of personal identity and traditional values, implemented with increasing ease in a continuously developing cyber world. Suffice it to say, this totalitarian socialist approach proposes a radically new profile of social behaviour, termed '*The Great Reset*', which is in stark contrast with traditional norms.<sup>7</sup> Still in its formative stage, can lessons be learned as to the possible outcomes? Experience in the Soviet Union over the last century is a sobering lesson that is especially relevant.

The participants at Sochi interpreted current policies in the Western World as a form of revolution akin, in many respects, to the revolution in Russia in 1917 when the Bolsheviks, driven by the dogmas of Marx and Engels, single-mindedly sought 'to change existing ways and customs and not just political and economic ones, but the very notion of human morality and the foundations of a healthy society.'<sup>8</sup> The debate at Sochi further asserted: 'We are facing systemic changes in all directions, from the increasingly complicated geo-physical condition of our planet to a more paradoxical interpretation of what a human is and what the reasons for his existence are.' The debate warned that 'any geopolitical, scientific and technical, or ideological rivalry becomes pointless in this context if the winners will have not enough air to breathe or nothing to drink.'

Lessons should be drawn from Russia's 'difficult and sometimes tragic past,' and, in particular, recognising, 'the destruction of age-old values, religion and relations between people, up to and including the total rejection of family; encouragement to inform on loved ones; affirming so-called 'social progress' by those who believe they are introducing humanity to some kind of a new and better consciousness; and promoting socio-political structure or values that someone, for their own reasons, has called universal. Ignoring the philosophical, moral, and spiritual aspects also gives free rein to scientific developments that might well compromise and surpass an individual's ability to think and to reason: 'Where is the limit of interference in the human body beyond which a person ceases being himself?' they asked. These changes are gaining momentum, and they certainly cannot be stopped because they are objective as a rule. Egotistic interests continue to prevail over the notion of the common good.'

The history of Russia shows that, in the end, 'it is impossible to impose anything on anyone, be it the principles underlying the socio-political structure or values that someone, for their own

7 V.J. McBrierty and D.M.D Murphy and C.P. Power, '*A New, wholly Secular, World Order?*', *Furrow*, 72: October 2021, pp. 561-564, V.J. McBrierty and D.M.D. Murphy, '*The Church in Crisis: the Prophetic Dimensions: Quo Vadis, Prophecy or Fantasy?*', *The Furrow*, 73: (2022). pp.106-111.

8 See footnote 7.

reasons, has called universal. ... After all, it is clear that when a real crisis strikes, there is only one universal value left and that is human life, which each state decides for itself how best to protect itself based on its abilities, culture, and traditions. They concluded their analysis on a positive note: 'Unfortunately, we had to bring back many sad memories, but at least our society has developed what they now refer to as herd immunity to extremism that paves the way to upheavals and socio-economic cataclysms. People really value stability and being able to live normal lives and to prosper while confident that the irresponsible aspirations of another group of revolutionaries will not upend their plans and aspirations. It is fervently hoped that the current so-called progress in the West will not take a comparable length of time to correct itself.'<sup>9</sup>

Archbishop Viganò also considered 'the Great Reset' to be 'a global coup d'état in which a financial and ideological élite has succeeded in seizing control of part of national governments, public and private institutions, the media, the judiciary, politicians and religious leaders,' thereby creating the worst dictatorships of all time because of its wholly global reach in our cyber universe.<sup>10</sup>

These collective observations define the scope of the formidable global challenges through which the current synodal pathway must steer.

Since time immemorial, the Church has relied on a supportive internal administration to carry out its core pastoral mission, with periodic reviews and renewal of its dual responsibilities in an ever-changing world. Such is the case with the forthcoming Synod in 2023, facing into a world riven by pandemic and rampant growth of social secularization as outlined above. The challenge is indeed formidable in a church that has developed internal flaws and weaknesses, most notably in the wake of Vatican II, as described by B.F. Meyer in 1971,<sup>11</sup> by S. Mulligan in 2012,<sup>12</sup> and in many

9 This debate clarifies the reason for the persistent reference to Russia in the Marian Apparitions, initially in Fatima, some months before the revolution in 1917. Our Lady asked for 'the Consecration of Russia to My Immaculate Heart and the Communion of Reparation on the first Saturdays. If my demands are followed, Russia will be converted, and peace will come. If not, Russia will spread her errors throughout the world, bringing about wars and persecutions against the Church.... Many nations will be destroyed. At the end, My Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to Me, which will be converted, and an era of peace will be given to the world.' On March 25, 1984, Pope John Paul II solemnly consecrated the world and Russia to Mary's Immaculate Heart as had been first requested in Fatima. The errors to which the debate refers are precisely the errors advocated in *the Great Reset*.

10 Archb. Carlo Maria Viganò, ChurchMilitant.com, November 18, 2021.

11 B.F. Meyer, *The Church in Three Tenses*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. (1971)

12 S. Mulligan (ed.), 'Reaping the Harvest: Fifty Years after Vatican II', The Columba Press, Dublin, 2012.

apparitions and spiritual occurrences.<sup>13</sup> There has been scant improvement in the Church over the last decade, increasingly falling victim to new knowledge not, as yet, fully understood. Change generates uncertainty, and uncertainty generates instability in the minds of those who fear the unknown, which, in turn, more than ever, is clouding the fundamentals of Christian dogma. As to the underlying ailments, Meyer argued that ‘faith becomes in time a heritage, and the inheriting of faith is a subtle process. The heirs are inevitably set the task of discriminating between the inalienable and the irrelevant, between fidelity and bias. This need to discriminate defines the root problem of the contemporary theology of the Church: within the Church itself, the tools of discrimination are in disrepair.’<sup>14</sup> In particular, the balance between the institutional and pastoral dimensions needs to be redefined to address the problems within before addressing the challenges without.<sup>15</sup>

History again has much to offer, recalling earlier periods of dramatic change when visionary guidance was urgently required. Two such leaders come to mind, namely, Pope Gregory I (c.540-604) who bridged the Holy Roman Empire and the Medieval epochs<sup>16</sup> and Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) who held office following the dissolution of the Papal States and created a roadmap to steer the Church into the twentieth century and beyond.<sup>17</sup> Although centuries apart, the scale of the challenges and the way in which they were addressed were remarkably similar. The life experience of both left them well equipped to develop a meaningful relationship between Church and State with policies that were progressive, remedial, and visionary at the forefront of civil governance while maintaining the core Christian dogma handed on from Christ and the apostles.

In preparing for the forthcoming Synod in Ireland in 2023, the discussion thus far has singled out a number of key areas to be addressed in a world in which the technological revolution continues to raise a range of philosophical, moral, and spiritual questions. It is indeed a time for change, but what should be the nature and focus of such change?

- *The Institutional Church:* As the historical profile above shows, the fundamental dogmas, defined in the Church’s teachings over

13 See footnotes 1 and 11. See also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our\\_Lady\\_of\\_Fátima](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Fátima)

14 See footnote 13.

15 G. O’Hanlon, ‘Mapping a Way Forward for the Catholic Church in Ireland’, *The Furrow*, 72: (2021) pp.455-463

16 Pope Saint Gregory I, <https://catholicism.org/gregory-great.html>

17 C.J. O’Malley (ed.), ‘*The Great White Shepherd of Christendom, Pope Leo XIII: his life, poems, encyclicals and public documents*’, J.S. Hyland & Company, Chicago (1903)

millennia, are the bedrock of the Church and are inviolable in any attempt to achieve change, in the interpretation of recurring parlance such as ‘Papal Re-set’. ‘Tradition is not a museum, true religion is not a freezer, and doctrine is not static but grows and develops. Tradition is not a museum, it remains a living tradition whereby the doctrine handed on by Christ and the Apostles must always be paramount and cannot be changed’.<sup>18</sup> The Old and New Testaments provide a rich and timeless tapestry of humanity’s relationship with the Almighty. All of Christianity, past, present and future, is typically encapsulated in the writings of St. Paul and in his total fidelity to the mystery of Christ.<sup>19</sup> This is also emphasized by St. John of the Cross when he reflects on St. Paul’s message not to grow weary in the midst of tribulation but to be steadfast, rooted and grounded in the love of Christ.<sup>20</sup> On a journey that is never easy, the focus must always be directed to Christ on the cross, accepting the many crosses that come our way in life as a form of divine currency towards the expiation of sin.<sup>21</sup> Pope Gregory viewed the mediation of the sacraments, and the Eucharist, as central to salvation in a troubled world.

The current mission to achieve global *brotherhood* cannot preclude the *fatherhood* of God as it is central to Christian belief: Christ’s message that we are all brothers stems from the fatherhood of God. That said, the different approaches to spirituality since time immemorial must be respected, and not viewed as a threat.

- *The Church and State*: The Compendium of Christian Doctrine clearly sets out the basic ground rules in defining the relationship between Church and State. Martin Luther King interpreted those fundamentals in stating that ‘the church must be reminded that it is not the master nor the servant of the State, but rather the conscience of the State. It must be the guide and the critic of the State, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority’.<sup>22</sup>

18 Pope Francis, in conversation with Austin Ivereigh, ‘*Let us Dream*’, Simon and Schuster, London, 2020

19 Letters of Paul, especially 1 & 2 Corinthians, with special reference to 1 Cor 12:1-31.

20 Spiritual Canticle of John of the Cross.

21 V.J. McBrierty, ‘*The Sign of the Cross*’, *The Furrow*, 72: (2021) 180-181.

22 Martin Luther King Jr., <https://sojo.net/media/dr-kings-reminder-church-conscience-state>.

- A more comprehensive and meaningful approach to lay participation should be addressed since each baptized member of the Church is called to cooperative participation in the mission of Christ and of the Church. As emphasized in Vatican II, this flows from our baptism which confers on us the right and the duty to participate fully in the life and mission of Christ and the Church. This follows on from Pope Gregory's assertion that every Christian has a place in the concord of the church, from contemplatives and laity, a participation that must be viewed as cooperative, not threatening.<sup>23</sup>
- *Personal Faith*: The alarming fall-off in Church attendance and in vocations to the priesthood since Vatican II signals the need for a new mission of *re-conversion* to augment the Church's age-old external mission of evangelization. This will involve a greater understanding of faith, not a faith of *fear* but a faith of *love* involving a personal relationship through prayer with Christ. Faith remains an essential element if we are to deal with the imponderable questions that cannot be answered with human logic. But it is not a blind faith: It is a faith that draws fundamentally upon the life of Christ on earth, on the prophets, and on sacred scripture. It is also a faith, according to H.N.V. Temperley, that draws upon our inner conscience of morality, an aesthetic appreciation of beauty, and the power of the individual to gain knowledge about the universe.<sup>24</sup> This is where the scientist, the poet, and the composer have an edge. Nature indeed provides a meaningful metaphor when wrestling with the concept of 'faith', which requires belief to address this category of human uncertainty. The poet Keats, pondering on the wondrous complexities of life, recognised that the beauty of creation is bound up with the mystery of creation, the unsolved wonders, the unknown, the uncertainty that is indeed a fundamental aspect of human life, that is, '*unfathomed complexity linked to perfect order*'. In dealing with the uncertainties of life, he further remarked: '*When man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason ... the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration*'.<sup>25</sup> Keats's appreciation of the wonders of nature led him to its creator whereas revelation

23 See footnote 22.

24 H.N.V. Temperley, '*A Scientist who believes in God*', Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1961, pp. 96-108.

25 J. Keats, '*Selected Poems and Letters: George and Thomas Keats, 21 Dec. 1817*', D. Bush (ed.), Harvard Univ., Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, Mass. (1959). p.261.

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leads us to the full salvific mission of Christ. But, in the end, as one learned preacher once summed it up: Human reasoning brings you to the door of the church, faith brings you into the sanctuary.

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that the ongoing ‘papal re-set’<sup>26</sup> does not follow the same route specified in ‘the Great Reset’ which eliminates God, deifies humanity and makes science and technology its saviour.<sup>27</sup> In this context, the guidance of the Apostles Peter, Paul and John is entirely apposite.<sup>28</sup>

26 See footnote 19.

27 See footnote 6.

28 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Pet 2:1-3; 1 John 2:24; 1Cor 12:4-31.

**Securing the Future.** My contention is that it is now the time when the leadership of today’s Church, with insight and discernment, with courage and honesty, must take a fresh look at the Christianity it has created over the past two millennia, a Christianity in which we have been brought up and lived all our lives up to this second decade of the first century of the third millennium and consider what needs to be changed, and then change it. Living things that do not change die. Acceptance by the apostles and first disciples in council in the year 49 of the necessity of fundamental change saved the Church from being just a small sect within Judaism and dying out. That gave it its own identity and independent existence, and at that time and until recently it enabled it to take the gospel to almost every nation.

– MICHAEL KNOWLES, *The Meeting that Changed the World* (Durham, England: Sacristy Press) p.3.