



*Health in the Lord and the Blessing of the Holy Spirit..[Rule of Saint Albert]*

**JPIC 110-OCTOBER 2021**

Saudavel iha Maromak no grasa Spirtu Santo Nian . [Regula Sto Alberto]

## Re-Visioning Our Church

**Fr. Anthony Scerri** comes to the pages of JPIC with Carmelite and human wisdom and experience



unrivalled. A fluent speaker of Italian, Arabic, French, English, Maltese, Indonesian and two local Sumatran languages, his ministry as a Carmelite has seen him as an educator both at secondary and tertiary levels. A very formative experience was his time lived in Sumatera [Indonesia] for 23 years, after which he was chosen by the Order to be on the **General Council**.

During that time, he was responsible for advancing the Order in **AFRICA** [Burkino Faso, Cameroon, Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania, Liberia, Zimbabwe, the Congo], **ASIA** [Vietnam, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, The Philippines, India,] **OCEANIA** [Timor Leste, Noumea, Wallis and Futuna, Papua New Guinea].

He is currently a member of the Carmelite community at Wentworthville NSW.

*As our church gathers for the Plenary Council we offer you this reflection from (Fr) Anthony Scerri OCarm, in an essay he has entitled 'The Third Apostolic Church'.*

### Introduction

Pope Francis is opening slightly the way to the third church. His emphasis is not on papal documents, or documents of Ecumenical Councils, not on dogmas, or doctrines, nor on the authority of canon law or catechisms. His emphasis is on faith in Jesus Christ, the Scriptures, and on discerning and acting on what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church of today, wherever the Spirit may be leading the church. His emphasis is on discernment, not on taking theological or political positions in discussions. His emphasis is on discernment of what the Holy Spirit may be telling the people of God, the church. The Pope asks of synods and other meetings of church leaders to discern together what the Spirit is saying for the good of the church. At such meetings often conflicts often arise because those taking part take sides and positions, and defend them heatedly, mostly in good faith. The Pope emphasises discernment.

This is what Pope Francis did in the recent synod of the bishops of the Amazonian region. At the conclusion of the synod<sup>1</sup>, the bishops, and practically everyone else in the church, expected the Pope to come out with a decision, one way or another, especially concerning the ordination to the priesthood of tried married deacons, generally referred to as *virii probati*. Instead, Pope Francis wrote a letter<sup>2</sup> really inviting the bishops of the Amazonian region to continue the process of discernment before coming to a decision, and that the decision really rests with them and not with him. The Pope is thus signalling that bishops' conferences have the responsibility of coming to decisions on matters concerning their own regions, after discerning what the Spirit is saying to them. At the same time, Pope Francis is decentralising the



<sup>1</sup> Held in Rome, 6 to 27 October 2019

<sup>2</sup> In February 2020, Pope Frans sent his letter to the bishops of the Amazonian region. Among other things, the Pope wrote, "...the need for a radical, missionary renewal of the Amazonian church that involves inculturation at all levels, including in the liturgy, church ministries and organization, and the development of a specific ecclesial culture that is distinctively lay, that gives a greater role for the laity, and especially for women".

church by passing back to bishops their rightful place as successors of the Apostles, the same as he is the successor of Peter. A small but significant step forward towards the third Apostolic church.

This is a small beginning. The Holy Spirit has placed Pope Francis as leader of the church at this time in the history of the world for good reasons. After seventeen centuries of a monarchical, hierarchical, and centralised system of government in the church, Pope Francis is pointing the way to a church that needs to become once more an Apostolic church, a church built on faith in Jesus Christ, a church led by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a humble, servant church. The present second church needs radical changes.

### **The First Church**

The first church, the church of the Apostles and of their successors up to the early fourth century, was a poor church, a persecuted church, a church that sought answers to its problems in what the Apostles personally knew of Jesus, and in the Gospels and letters written by these same Apostles. They sought solutions to their problems in prayer, in faith in Jesus Christ, and in discernment and guidance of the Holy Spirit. They did not so much engage in theological arguments or in writing new dogmatic documents, but relied only on what the Evangelists and the other Apostles had handed down to them orally and in writing. The first church had only bishops, priests, and deacons as leaders, and all leaders were addressed by their names, as evidenced in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles,

### **The Second Church**

Early in the fourth century, the emperor Constantine, converted to Christianity. This was a cataclysmic event for the church. The emperor gave the first church freedom to practise its faith openly. This was a great and good gift to the church, which had suffered so much persecution and oppression for such a long time, at the hands of civil authorities throughout the Roman Empire. However, Constantine, in his zeal for his newly acquired faith, also gave to the leaders of the church and to some members of the laity, privileges, wealth, and positions of authority and power. He also thought it his privilege to intervene in the life, running, and ordering of the church<sup>3</sup>. The church then gradually began to adopt the imperial style of leadership and of legislation. The bishops gradually began to see their role as one, not of service, but of exercising authority, power, and control over their subjects, in the manner of the emperor and of the senators of the empire. They gradually began to wear senatorial-like clothes, live in senatorial luxury, and act in a senatorial manner towards the laity. Priests too began to exercise authority over the laity. Instead of serving the people, they expected people to serve them. The lines between church and state became blurred.



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<sup>3</sup> It was Constantine who called and funded the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. He also presided over the opening session, and took part in the discussions throughout the duration of the Council. This Council was an innovation in the sense that it was called by an emperor and not by the successors of the Apostles, and it was the first council which was supposed to be universal and not just a local Council such as that of Jerusalem about the year 50. In fact, the Western church was not represented at this council. The Council of Jerusalem relied heavily on prayer and discernment of what the Spirit had to say to the church. The Council of Nicaea relied heavily on theological arguments, which resulted in a declaration of faith in the form of the Nicene Creed, in an attempt at universal uniformity in the church. This Council also gave rise to disputes, which gave rise to divisions and separations within the body of the church, and those who separated themselves from the body of the church then, are still divided and separated to this day. .

In the Middle Ages, this concept of the manner in which bishops saw themselves, was further exacerbated when Popes and bishops actually became secular rulers of domains and states, and assumed new titles such as were used by kings, dukes, counts, viscounts, earls, and barons. This led to the creation of titles other than those of bishop, priest, and deacon in the church. Bishops acquired new titles such as those of Cardinal, patriarch, archbishop, and even some priests were elevated to the title of Monsignor, which is derived from the French title of *Mon Seigneur*, meaning My Lord. Monsignors were not ordained as bishops. Just another title of rank and added honour! The bishops were no longer addressed by their names or simply as father, but as ‘my Lord’, ‘your Grace’, ‘your Eminence’, ‘your reverence’, and, for political representatives of the states they ruled, ‘your Excellency’. These titles still persist in the twenty-first century, titles that have their roots in systems of civil governments. Jesus told his disciples and us, “you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one teacher and you are all brothers”.<sup>4</sup>

### Anthony’s Concluding remarks

We live in the twenty-first century, the digital age, the age of robots, the age of space exploration. Many nations are even now racing each other as to who will be first to establish a human settlement on the moon or on some other planet. The Catholic church is still living in part in Roman times, and in part in the Middle Ages. Many of its leaders and many members are resisting any change because it is disturbing or simply through stubbornness. There are a few members of the church, even today, who will not receive communion at all rather than change from receiving communion on the tongue. The Eucharist in the early church was a meal celebrated at table together, where the consecrated bread was broken and shared by hand by all those who were partaking of the banquet. The cup too was passed around to each person present,



When Pope Francis takes small steps to bring the church into the twenty-first century, he is immediately branded a heretic Pope. The same fate befalls bishops, priests, and deacons, who try to follow the example of Pope Francis in their dioceses or parishes. These small steps are the beginning of the coming of the third church. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, it may take a century or two for the third church to become a reality. Come it must, come it will by the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit. “... the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”<sup>5</sup>

We must discern what the Spirit is saying, and not what theologians say, learned and holy as they may be. We must learn from the past, but not go back to the past. We must know how to anticipate the future.



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<sup>4</sup> Mt 23:8

<sup>5</sup> Jn 14:28





God of wonders,  
You show us your beauty in all created things.

Help us to pay attention:  
To the taste of the ocean on our lips,  
The warmth of the sun on our hands,  
The song of birds in the morning and evening,  
The fragrance of the earth after rain,  
And to the star that guides us.

Creator God,  
We stand in awe of all that you have made.

Fill our hearts with gratitude  
For every good gift, great and small,  
That feeds and forms us,  
Inviting and enabling us  
To become people who are fully alive  
In your amazing grace. Amen.

**THE SEASON OF CREATION BEGAN ON 1 SEPTEMBER**, on the designated World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. It concludes this Sunday on 3 October, the Feast of Saint Francis.

This significant day of Sunday 3 October is also the commencement of the historic gathering for the Australian Church .... The **PLENARY COUNCIL**

**The Australian Catholic Bishops** in their Social Justice Statement *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, encourage us to continue to read the signs of the times. 'We know that we human beings need a change of heart, mind and behavior. [www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au](http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au)

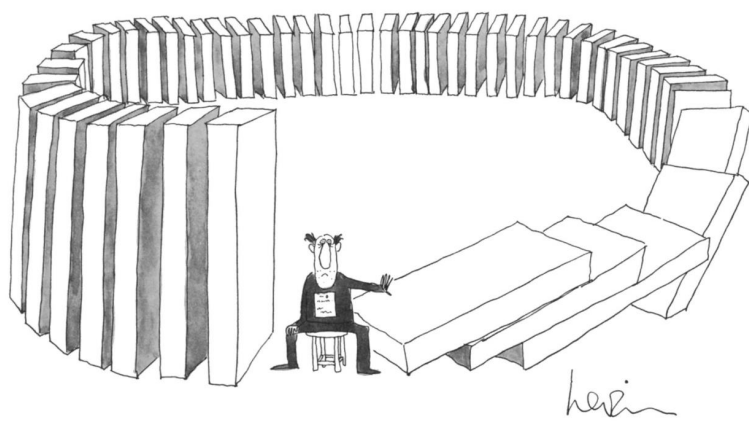
**Pope Francis** continues to call us to an ecological conversion and an economic conversion.

Families, parishes, dioceses, schools, universities and colleges, hospitals and healthcare organisations, businesses and farms, religious orders from all over the world are all invited to embark on a seven-year journey, called the **LAUDATO SI' ACTION PLATFORM**, towards seven *Laudato Si' Goals*:

- 1 **Respond** to the cry of the earth
- 2 **Respond** to the cry of the poor
- 3 **Work towards** ecological economics
- 4 **Adopt simple lifestyles**
- 5 **Undertake** ecological education
- 6 **Embrace** ecological spirituality
- 7 **Participate** in community action and involvement

***The Physical Science of Climate Change: Some humanitarian insights from the latest IPCC report*** ... Pablo Suarez, Erin Coughlan de Perez, Miriam Nielsen, Maarten van Aalst; The Hague, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre. (This summary is forwarded to us by the Carmelite NGO)

## ***Now what? We can and must get ready for our changing climate***



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Arnie Levin / CartoonStock.com

We obviously can't just sit there, and hope things will work out well. At a minimum, we must do what we can to reduce the risk posed by the growing climate hazards: getting out of harm's way ahead of an unprecedented tropical cyclone; considering rising risk when construction is planned in a floodplain, and many more climate change adaptations necessary in relation to health systems, water and food security, how we shape our growing cities, and much, much more.