Rowan Williams in these talks in 2006 spoke of the Cross as example, as sacrifice and as victory. The example of the Cross interprets God's love to us, makes it visible. The sacrifice opens the way for us to share in the life of God. The victory transforms what we are in this world, how we experience and how we hope and pray and worship and live. The Cross (and the resurrection, ascension and Pentecost) call us to share in the work of God that saves the world[1]

This lecture and the two following it explore some themes not only for the Church, but also for the country in which we live. The themes come from where I started, with the person of Jesus, his life and death and all that followed. They also come from our history as a country that has found itself caught up in different times and different ways in the story of Jesus. That story of Jesus runs through history and the whole of humanity.

Examples are too numerous to go through. They start, of course, here, in Canterbury with St Augustine in 597. They go through the civilising mission of the church in the mediaeval period, the resistance to over mighty Kings, the establishment of the rule of law in little chunks and pieces starting with Magna Carta (negotiated by an Archbishop of Canterbury). They pass through the reformation. The examples give a story of this country brilliantly lit and illustrated with heroes like Wesley, by renewals and reforms. Christianity has been central to the history of what we now call the UK and of England even when the UK or England did not know it was central, or did not exist.

It was the events of Holy Week that have determined all that history. Those events, of incarnation, of example, sacrifice and victory, were so monumental that not only did they set a culture for our history but they speak to our nation today of values and virtues and practices that are the right shape for us, even if we are not Christians. In a word they set the pattern for what we feel is right.

The accounts of Holy Week in the gospels know that this is the central story of all the cosmos. They want us to see in the accounts of this week the extravagance of response, the radicality of the gospel that demand not only Christ like lives for each person as they turn and seek Christ's power so as to be reflections of His love, but also those accounts demand transformed societies.

The struggle is how adequately to convey that picture of transformation. Even getting some kind of handle on what a society looks like in terms of a Christian heritage or basis exceeds our grasp. It has been the work of centuries, with many stops and starts and errors, with the humanity of the church in its witness to such a society constantly cluttering up the work of the Spirit of God through the lives of the church.

When I am in Lambeth I pass an old, crusty, twisted fig tree said to have come from a cutting from the Vatican planted by Cardinal Pole in 1556 after he burned his predecessor at the stake. I took a cutting back to the Pope – but he didn't say much.

Yet there are moments when the nature of changes in our country, whether we like them or not, offer extraordinary chances to reimagine what we are as a nation and to root that re-imagination in our Christian heritage. For a while, for some years there may be a chance to say to ourselves

“this is what we want to be at our best”, and actually to have more chance than normal of making it more likely to happen. At such moments then as Christians we should put in our three pennyworth. Happily, not being a theocracy we can’t decide for the country, but we can paint a picture of human flourishing based in our Christian culture and heritage and in the life of the Church as an icon, an illustration of what we hope our country can be.

For the last few months I have been writing another book (I have been trying to keep the first one secret, and judging by the sales have been at least moderately successful). Having finished my first one I said to all around me “If you ever see me start another book, you have my permission to lock me away”. Well, either they could not find a good enough gaol, or they did not notice, because there is another one, on British values, coming out next year. It was started after the Brexit vote, not because of rage or disappointment, but because Brexit seemed so important. Much of what I say tonight and in the next couple of evenings is based on that book. So at least you need not even think about buying it.

At their heart these lectures are emphasising what I just said: that the single most important moments in all of history were in the events of holy week, they changed the whole way the world should work, and when there are great changes in our lives and country, then the changes of holy week are the primary sources of inspiration for the values that should shape us in the future.

This evening I am going to do three things. First, I will look briefly at a beautiful passage in John 12, where Mary anoints the feet of Jesus. Then I will look at why this time in which we are living seems so important, given that for those alive their own time always seems so important. Finally, drawing on the story of Mary’s anointing I will try and draw some abbreviated conclusions on values, practices and virtues.

12 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them[a] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii[b] and the money given to the poor?” 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it[c] so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” ***[2]***

I only want to pick on a couple of points in this account: that it is ludicrously extravagant and that it does no-one any practical good.

Its extravagance is easy to measure. A denarius was about a day’s wage. Three hundred denarii is in modern terms slightly over a working year's pay. The average pay for a working year is over £25,000. This perfume was thus worth some tens of thousands of pounds in modern relative reward. No wonder they stared. I was reminded last week of a divorce case a couple of years back where one of the couple was showing what they required every month in income, including cosmetics worth thousands every month. So it was not just then!

It was deeply extravagant as a gift, ridiculously extravagant. It was pure gratuity, grace, an expression of profound love of Christ, because she saw that (since we are talking about cosmetics) he was worth it. Our response to Christ as individuals and as a church, and as a society, should be to be overwhelmed, so that we respond as ludicrously. It has happened before; look at Samuel Smiles words on the Huguenot chapel beneath us in the Crypt: “still that eloquent memorial of the religious history of the middle ages survives, bearing testimony alike to the rancour of the persecutions abroad, the heroic steadfastness of the foreign Protestants, the large and liberal spirit of the English church, and the glorious asylum which England has in all times given to foreigners flying for refuge against oppression and tyranny.”

Ludicrous extravagance that the Dean would let the Huguenots come. Imagine Canon Treasurer that we were asked for a low cost rent of a chapel today for 450 years for a non-Anglican group! Commissions and regulators would rise as one, lawyers, you name it, the protests would ring through the land. But letting them use the chapel was a large and liberal spirit. It was Mary’s spirit.

Secondly, the anointing did no practical good. Jesus did not benefit from it. No time was saved after the crucifixion. We would have advised Mary against such a culturally noticeable and sexually ambiguous statement. I can hear myself advising against it. Nobody is recorded as having their mind changed about Jesus as a result.

Let’s be clear, I am all in favour of plans and outcomes and spontaneous gestures being well prepared beforehand to get the result you want. But this is different. It is a genuine spontaneous outpouring of the heart, an expression of love and pleasure in knowing Jesus. Again that speaks of what leads to human flourishing. Human beings are not entirely transactional: we are filled with passion and when we reflect Christ we overflow to common good.

So why is that all so significant today? Because what we are to become as a nation is at this time especially open to choice and decision, and thus what the church has to show in itself and point to in its advocacy and example (and the church is of course all of us, not the institution) is the extravagant, gratuitous love that is the Kingdom of God and which when even palely absorbed into human society is the root and flower of human flourishing.

The great periods of change and reform in the way we behave as a nation have come from a combination of huge events and overseas influences. We have never been just some islands off the north-west coast of mainland Europe. In the mid-19th century, the ferment following the ending of the Napoleonic wars combined with the industrial and agricultural revolutions. At the same time victory over France, especially at sea, had led to the creation of the second British Empire. As more and more of the Indian sub-continent fell under British suzerainty, the demands of Empire grew, for better and for worse. It was a very potent mix of economic change at home and overseas development. It led to the reforms which began in 1832 largely inspired by Christians such as Wilberforce, Shaftesbury and others, and which continued apace until the Education Act of 1870 and afterwards.

In the period after World War II there were again major internal and external forces at play. Internally, the memories of the Great Depression and the suffering of the 1930s, especially in the north, in agricultural areas and away from London, all led to a reforming of economic management along Keynesian lines, with a strong emphasis on state involvement and an explicit target of full employment. Once again external events also played an enormous role in the reimagining of Britain. This time it was the loss of Empire, beginning with India and Pakistan in August 1947, Myanmar (then Burma) and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in early 1948, and progressively by the mid-1960s substantially all the British Empire. At the same time the relationships with what had been called the Dominions also changed as they began to trade more in their own regions, and immigration to them from around the world altered the sense of near exclusive link with the UK.

These vast external changes had a profound effect on the UK economy, especially once continental Europe began to recover rapidly from the effects of the war. As a result of internal and external changes the UK reimagined itself into being part of the European Union, withdrawing from far flung overseas commitments and struggling to define its place in the world.

There were further, less dramatic bumps in the road, with a certain economic recasting, especially in the period after 1973, with the first oil crisis coinciding with the advent of large scale production in the North Sea, both of oil and gas. It is another subject entirely as to whether the huge revenues were well or badly used, and it is certainly arguable that they were more of a curse than a blessing. However, after an initial period (shared with much of the economically developed world) of high inflation and market turbulence, including the near default by the UK in 1976 requiring IMF assistance, there was a significant shift in economic policy. Although it was very important economically, and eventually culturally, it was less a reimagination than an adjustment. Unemployment ceased to be targeted and first rose very sharply before falling back very slowly. Financial services grew in importance and London, almost always the single most powerful part of the UK economy since the early middle ages, became completely dominant, while vast swathes of former industrial areas, or of those linked to mining, docks and heavy industry, were left to their own devices, with very severe economic effects from which they still suffer.

One of the things I learned as Dean of Liverpool was that Liverpool Docks, once employing 20,000, by 2007 employed 250 to 300. Dock jobs had the highest number of multiplication, one dock job supported 20 other jobs.

The difference from 1945 was that this was adjustment without colossal change in economics combined with massive overseas change. After the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany in 1990, which ended formally World War II, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the European Union expanded into a market of around 500 million people, dominant in our trade, but as we were already a member this did not have a huge impact on our foreign policy. The war in the South Atlantic to recapture the Falkland Islands, in 1982, was hugely important psychologically, as was the first war in Kuwait and Iraq, in 1991, but again they did not lead to a huge shift in policy. We remained more or less willingly part of the European Union, and our trade with Europe was of great significance. Financial services and the role of the City of London

continued to grow, even as the significance of North Sea hydrocarbon production fell, so that in the words of my favourite economist Martin Wolf, by 2008 we had become a monocrop economy.[3]

The result of being a monocrop economy, in which financial services are the crop, was that the financial crisis and associated Great Recession of 2008 had a profound effect on the UK from which it has yet to recover. Although economic output is above the previous peak, the cumulative foregone growth during the period of slowdown is enormous. The psychological effects are even greater. Non-financial companies continue to hoard cash. Short term interest rates remain near to zero, as do long term government bond yields, so that the UK government is borrowing at the lowest rate since the 14th century – there were no records before then. Investment is depressed. Employment fell less than anticipated, in part owing to employees accepting cuts in pay in inflation adjusted terms, or even in absolute amounts. However, as we know there is a historically high level of inequality and a continuing very high level of domination by London, with many parts of the country lagging seriously. Compare the economy of London with that of the North West or North East – the difference is as between two continents.

It is the combination of massive economic shock and huge external change that I suggest makes the next couple of decades or more a period of reimagination on the scale after 1945, or in the mid-19th century, rather than simply an adjustment as in the 1970s and 1980s. The external change is, of course, leaving the European Union.

I use the words external change rather than external shock very deliberately. It is impossible to foresee the long or short term effects of Brexit.

Some argue that it will be simply a period of opportunity, with boundless liberation, money for everyone, and like Doctor Pangloss in Voltaire's Candide, all will be for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The negotiations are simple, the period of two years to complete them is ample, and the adjustment will be helpful. New trade treaties will be negotiated with all and sundry in the twinkling of an eye. The Commonwealth will become a major trading counterparty: by the end of the process we will, like the Dodo in Alice in Wonderland, say "EVERYBODY has won and everybody will have prizes."

Others, on the remain side, are apocalyptic in their forecasts. They foresee the Four Horsemen of the Book of Revelation (death, hunger, war and conquest), or at the least the UK economy becoming like that of Greece, with massive rises in unemployment, a sharp fall in the value of the pound, consequent high inflation, the country turning in on itself and succumbing to extremism and xenophobia. They argue that the negotiators for the European Union, and after them the individual states and the European Parliament, have no incentive to negotiate a good deal for the UK, as although the UK is a trading partner of importance for the block, for each country it is less essential. They think that the Union will need to punish the UK to deter subsequent attempts to leave. They think the time for negotiation wildly inadequate and thus the chance of a hard Brexit high. They foresee years without good trade arrangements, a country ill prepared to stand on its own outside the European Union and little interest from those with whom we hope to trade. They forecast government utterly absorbed in negotiation and Parliament occupied ~~for ye~~ars in

consequent legislation. If those wildly in favour sometimes seem to resemble Dr Pangloss, those most against risk giving the impression of channelling the depressed robot, Marvin, the Paranoid Android, in 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy'.

This is all the normal material of knockabout politics. The first principle of great change is that the effects are unforeseeable, and although one side or another may be right, the most likely outcome is a bit of this, a bit of that and a lot of things that nobody had foreseen owing to other external events unknown at present. The task of reimagination of our future values is far more complicated than after 1945, and the result is that the process will be one of generations not of a few years.

However, there are also huge differences between now and 1945, both external and internal. Internally, society has become a great deal more complicated. Politically, some of the old binary certainties of everyone being either Labour or Conservative have faded, at least for the moment. In 1945 there was no multiculturalism, and very little diversity of major faith traditions, except within Christianity. Inequality was less and poverty much greater. Austerity united. Most important of all was the absence of the effects of communications and electronic technologies. Although the war had seen vast improvements in some aspects of technology there was no sense in which they had yet had a huge impact on popular culture. That was to come, foreseen by some, interestingly including the Church of England in a report called "Towards the Conversion of England", published in 1944.

Today's society is faster, more complicated, more independent and more confused. Religious observance is far weaker, yet where it occurs, far more committed. Political life is very complicated, and nationalism and populism are strong, the former especially in Scotland. The very existence of the UK is seen as at risk.

Externally, the changes are also enormous, but very different. The biggest is globalisation of trade, communication, business, tourism and a million other things. The Empire has gone, but the countries that were liberated by its fall are much closer to us in many ways. Most of all, there is the enormous uncertainty of seeking a role outside the European Union, with very little idea of what it looks like, or even if it looks that different at all.

But what does reimagination look like? Internal and external change have come together to create a moment of choice. But as well as the political, economic and human geography, the philosophical and ethical and religious culture of the country is also far more complex and challenging than in 1945.

Our deepest narrative of a good society in this land is the Christian one. It is an ever growing story of how the great virtues and benefits of gracious love are lived out in the hard pounding of a changing world. Moments of great change require us both to keep in contact with the deep narrative, and also to express what that means in new ways.

Moments of change are moments of great hope and opportunity. They are usually surrounded by threats, perceived or real, but the opportunity to spring clean the detritus of culture and habit at a national level is a gift and not only a danger. This is so, provided that the hope for change is built upon values of virtue and grace, of love and common humanity, and not on selfishness, inward looking self-absorption, self-protection and fear. That is why we face choices.

To reimagine ourselves today requires a radical imagination that must take in a plurality of religions (William Temple was dealing only with Christianity), that faces a significantly more secular society and polity, that engages with multi-ranging values, and that is post-Brexit, but like 1945 in respect of the 1930s, that recognises the needs and the rightful demands of those left out of the rapid increase in wealth over the last 25 years.

After 1945, both in Britain and across Europe, there were dramatic changes in social policy, in economics and in philosophy. In the UK, the Labour Government from 1945-1951 introduced massive reforms in social benefits, in the creation of the NHS and in the shaping of the economy towards low unemployment as a virtue in itself. They were guided to some extent not only by their own thinking but also significantly by the views of Christians such as the philosopher Tawney, the Archbishop of York and then Canterbury, William Temple, and Sir William Beveridge. Those three had been friends for years and co-operated deeply in the formation of their ideas, not least by sitting round the table together.

Both in Europe and in the UK, the reimagining of society drew consciously and unconsciously on the ancient narratives of Christian faith, interpreted over the centuries, especially since 1893 in the rapidly growing *corpus* of Catholic Social Teaching.[4] There was, in the words of Edmund Burke, a reality to the idea that society is a contract taking the form of "a partnership… between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born".[5] The great reinvention of Europe and the UK after 1945 was not a static contract, but a dynamic leap into new forms of relationship that nevertheless kept faith with the underlying Christian faith and tradition of the countries involved.

The danger today is of having a rootless and self-protective society without generosity, arising from a lack of confidence of what it is to be British. One form of a Christian hope faithful to our past is of a generous society rooted in history, committed to the common good in the present and a steward of the hopes and joys of future generations in our own country and around the world.

By contrast, today, much looks good. Among the great and beneficial changes have been radical improvements in the status of groups previously oppressed: women, ethnic minorities, those with disabilities. The development of a deep suspicion of power has made government more difficult but served many groups well. The changes were not only in culture. This was the period of the rapid development of Judicial Review as a way of holding Government to account. Human Rights legislation came to centre stage. Status was no longer seen as giving entitlement to power. A new move in philosophy either reflected or led to these changes (the argument is endless as to which), in which hypermodernity or postmodernity gave more and more centrality to the individual, to autonomous decision-making and to suspicion of ancient rules and institutions. The change

has been uncomfortable for many of those institutions including our own.

However, there is also now a lack of common values, the breakdown of our more or less single historic narrative of virtue in the Christian tradition. We need to suggest ways in which policies could be more closely linked to historic virtues without crushing the diversity and freedom which are so attractive in modern life. Values are expressed in actions, in practices, not mainly in words. Generosity is seen in the act of giving, not mere goodwill. Values do not make actions, nor do actions make values. They are in a dynamic and iterative relationship, mutually reinforcing or mutually destructive. A person or nation or group or society cannot stop the world while they sort out values, but we express our values through responding to the existential challenges we face at the moment.

Underlying the temporary values that spring from changing circumstances, there are the deep understandings of what makes for virtue, of what is good in absolute and permanent terms. It is what Aslan in CS Lewis' 'The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe' calls the "deep magic". In such deep values lies the force which drives us forward and corrects our errors. When the deep values are fractured then all hell breaks out. The deep values are those which set our boundaries and cause us instinctively to say ‘this is not right’, or ‘that is wrong’. The link between our policies and expressed values and the deep magic are what gives us a certain ability to embrace change without losing all continuity with the past, or all sense of how we make sense of facts before us.

As structures changed, mainly for economic reasons, so did culture and also values, and the three forces interacted randomly, with very unpredictable results. The result is a society in which much is better, but there are also huge dangers. The privatisation of Christian faith and the consequent diminution of a national meta-narrative of virtue and vice, leading in some ways to the divorce of ends and means of policy, has led to an absolute lack of foundations to deal with numerous faiths, different cultures, globalised economies, and above all, a world in which all values from all over the world confront us more rapidly and effectively than ever before. Public faith was and probably still is sometimes more surface than reality.

Nevertheless when faith is increasingly privatised it leaves a vacuum which relativism in belief or a great plurality of incommensurable beliefs is unable to fill. There is a need for a generous and hospitable meta-narrative within which competing truths can be held, a narrative which has the spirit of Mary, extravagant, gracious, beautiful.

It will be the suggestion of these talks that Christian faith, especially in what we see of Jesus in Holy Week, provides the potential for such hospitable and generous holding and thus for national reimagining, and that the role of the church, pre-eminent amongst what Temple called intermediate institutions, is to be a model and example of the generous spirit of such reimagining. Tomorrow I will look at some of the sets of values and practices to which we should as God’s people bear witness in a country facing great choice.

[1] Rowan Williams 'God with us', SPCK 2017 page 31

[2] John 12:1-7 NRSV

[3] Article in the FT of January 2009

[4] Well summarised in *The Social Agenda: A Collection of Magisterial Texts* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2000). Available for download from http://www.thesocialagenda.org/. Catholic Social Teaching is the continually developing and very sophisticated body of thinking from the Popes that applies Christian belief to social, economic, cultural and environmental issues.

[5] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003 [1790]), 82, https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=OYkPY-EljD0C&num=13.

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