



Centre for Faith
& Public Issues



Pope Francis and Let's Dream 1

- *Clive Pearson*

For some time, I have been concerned at the lack of theological voice on COVID-19 from our church leaders and the church 'media'. I mean something more than the latest advice on health and safety protocols, surveys on increased prayer and what can be done on-line and how the future will be different. I have been haunted by the comment made by the Oxford-based theologian, Angela Tilby, wondering if the church had lost its voice / its message in these times of a pandemic. I was also mindful of how Luther had responded with a mix of practical advice and theological comment during the pandemic he faced: it is with some relief that I happened upon Pope Francis' Let's Dream.

The Pope sees the present time as a time of 'reckoning', 'trial' and 'crisis'. It is a time of 'sifting'. Francis assumes that how we emerge from such a crisis we will not be the same as before. The Pope argues that these times of reckoning and sifting 'reveal' what is in our heart. In that respect it differs from 'normal times' when you seldom have to show who you really are. Francis is deeply aware of those who seek to exploit such situations; he is also mindful of the temptation for us to 'retreat': 'we pull back for tactical reasons'. He speaks of 'functional retreats' where people seek to preserve 'their own place' rather than allowing us to be 'struck by what we see, knowing suffering will change' us. The alternative is 'taking up and embracing the Cross'.

Francis makes use of references to Isaiah, the groaning creation in Romans and the parable of the Good Samaritan in his preface.

The Pope reckons that the pandemic can also be regarded as a metaphor. Covid 19 is the most obvious, visible pandemic - but there are others to do with hunger, the trauma of war and the impact of climate change. This present pandemic invites us to 'dream big' / 'to re-think our priorities'. It is time to serve 'the common good' 'with an overflowing of mercy'.
