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28 November 2013: Michael Blakstad, St Laurence catholic Church

The world has changed

In September, the Pope criticised 'the Catholic Church's obsession with the issues of abortion, gay marriage and contraception.' He added: 'We have to find a new balance; otherwise the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel.'



As a liberal catholic, I welcome this indication that Pope Francis is aware of the radical changes which have taken place in social attitudes. Over 90% of American catholic women use contraception in direct contravention of the Church's ruling. Many of their parish priests turn a blind eye. The previous two Popes took a hard line on the subject, unwilling to acknowledge any part the Church's bar on contraception might play in Third World overpopulation.

And how the world has changed. Young women (and men!) wear clothes which would have scandalised our parents. Couples living in partnership before marriage is accepted as the norm. Gay people no longer suffer intolerance from friends and parents.

So where does the Catholic Church now stand? What Pope Francis appears to be saying is 'Look around, the world has changed. We have an important role to play in a world riven by poverty and war, so let us not be seen as obsessed with what are, in comparison, less important issues. Let us be tolerant of a changing world, and not appear bigoted and dogmatic.'

The next steps are the important ones. The Anglican church has shown how difficult it can be to introduce liberal reforms, with opposition often coming from the developing world. Catholics have much, much further to go. If anyone can start us on this road, it is our new and very impressive Pope.