

Friends reunited in faith

A conference next weekend in Liverpool on social justice has taken inspiration from the partnership forged in the 1970s by the city's Anglican and Catholic bishops, David Sheppard and Derek Worlock. It is the brainchild of Sheppard's daughter, Jenny Sinclair, who talked to Elena Curti about the initiative, her parents' legacy and her own unexpected faith journey



Most of her adult life, says Jenny Sinclair, was lived in the shadow of her parents. Her father, David Sheppard, was a national hero as a Test cricketer, who also enjoyed a high profile later as the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool. Her mother, Grace, was a vicar's daughter with a strong faith and iron will. Jenny, their only

child, admits she avoided any association with her father's name for many years. "People make a judgement about you so quickly if they think you are a bishop's daughter. I was so not like what people expected. I was quite a rebel as a teenager," she said.

There is no hint of rebelliousness in this well-groomed, classically dressed woman today. The impulse to dissociate herself from her parents has also long gone. In fact, for the last two years she has devoted her considerable energy to a project that seeks to build on their legacy. A large part of this revolves around the relationship that her father forged with his Catholic counterpart in Liverpool, Derek Worlock, and with leaders of the free churches in the city. She is working on a new initiative called Together for the Common Good, which examines how individuals and organisations of all faiths can collaborate on issues of social justice. Participants are looking at homelessness, debt, human trafficking – in fact all things that have their roots in poverty – and how they can be addressed.

A 12-month research study is in progress and next weekend sees a significant milestone with a major conference at Liverpool Hope University. The Archbishop of Birmingham, Bernard Longley, is among the speakers, as is the Labour MP Frank Field and the political thinkers Phillip Blond and Labour peer Maurice Glasman.

Sinclair feels the emphasis that Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, have given to addressing poverty and the common good has made the initiative even more timely. She has spent the last few weeks putting the final touches to the conference while staying at her late mother's house in the Wirral, but she has also had meetings in London and it is during one of her trips down south that we met to talk about the genesis of the project and her life.

The initiative has grown since spring 2011 when Sinclair first had the idea of a small colloquium looking at the Sheppard-Worlock legacy. She says she consulted others – more

than 100 people in six months – and the project developed. Sinclair confesses to sometimes feeling out of her depth. In this, she reminds me of her own description of her father as a "slogger", but also someone with a terror of failing to master his brief.

David Sheppard arrived in Liverpool in June 1975, six months before Derek Worlock, and Sinclair recalls him going to Archbishop's House with a bottle of wine for his new Catholic counterpart. She maintains there was no chemistry to spark the relationship but there were shared aims. Their skills, as Sinclair describes them, were complementary: Worlock, the brilliant and dynamic manager, and Sheppard, a good team leader with a courage dating back to his time as first bat in cricket.

"They came from very distinct traditions but they were both inspired by the dignity of the human person," said Sinclair, describing Liverpool in the 1970s as divided along sectarian lines. There were Orange Lodge marches and, she said, communities were divided by suspicion and misunderstanding. The two bishops were warned not to challenge the status quo but Worlock soon became a regular visitor to Bishop's Lodge.

"Derek would come round and sit at the kitchen table and chat," said Sinclair. She said her mother formed her own relationship with the new Catholic bishop and they became close over the years. "In a way what she did for that relationship was to humanise it, to enable the clerical guard to be dropped so that Derek and David could see each other as human beings and not as church leaders, and because she was involved that added an extra dimension," said Sinclair.

Sinclair believes that towards the end of her life her mother felt drawn to the Catholic faith, though she says her loyalty to the Church of England would never have permitted Grace to leave it. The achievements of the partnership of Sheppard and Worlock included the healing of sectarian divisions and the development of a host of grass-roots community projects. They walked the streets together

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after the Toxteth riots of 1981 and helped establish the Liverpool 8 Law Centre.

Sinclair was just seven when her father became Bishop of Woolwich and his move to Liverpool six years later was a huge upheaval as she tried to adjust to a much bigger house, complete with chapel, chaplain, secretary, gardener, cleaner and chauffeur. Later she went away to university and then spent two long periods in China studying Mandarin. She has worked as a screen-printer, artist, film-maker and charity worker. She had stopped going to church in her mid-teens, then in her early twenties she met her future husband who was a Catholic and she went to Mass for the first time with him.

"When I finally did discover the Catholic Church, it was like a very new landscape for me. It had never really crossed my radar before. It felt as though I was being called home somehow. It felt very comfortable," said Sinclair.

She became a Catholic in 1988 at the age of 26. No doubt the Sheppards found this painful but their daughter believes they had prayed for her to return to the Church and their prayers were answered, albeit in an unexpected way. After David Sheppard's death in 2005, Sinclair said she began to feel more comfortable about associating herself with his name. She said the birth of her own children – she has two teenage sons – helped, and her relationship with her mother improved.

When Grace died suddenly in 2010, Sinclair took charge of the Sheppard-Worlock legacy. And then there is Derek Worlock, to whom she became closer after becoming a Catholic. Sinclair spent a lot of time with him between 1988 and his death from cancer in 1996. "I was conscious at that stage that he was probably the one person that really understood what I had done. He knew my parents in a way that I did through faith, better than anybody else. Probably the last thing he said to me before he died was, 'There is so much yet to do.' And he was so frustrated that he had to die before he had done what he wanted to do. When this idea came to me I did remember that and I felt all along that David, Derek and Grace have been pushing me one way or another," said Sinclair.

She said she has also drawn inspiration from the Catholic philosopher Jean Vanier, and his federation of L'Arche communities for people with disabilities and those who care for them. She quoted remarks from Vanier about helping people find their dignity and Pope Francis' words about common action for others. The Together project, she insisted, is not just for social justice organisations but individuals as well.

"Whatever your role in life the common good is something we can all relate to and use it as a benchmark to ask ourselves what are we doing," said Sinclair. "Crucially, what is my faith driving me to choose to do? What's motivating me?"

(To find out more about Together for the Common Good visit <http://www.togetherforthecommongood.co.uk>)

CHRISTOPHER HOWSE'S PRESSWATCH

'The Middle East is notable for wrong-footing Western commentators'



When the general made his broadcast telling the nation that the army was in charge, the Pope was sitting on his left in a little armchair with stripy upholstery. This was not Pope Francis of course, but Pope Tawadros II, the Coptic primate. Italy had already shuffled off inconvenient democracy earlier, when the unelected Mario Monti became head of government – but that was 16 months before Pope Francis was elected.

Pope Tawadros had been chosen in November 2012 by a blindfolded boy pulling his name not out of a hat but from a "crystal chalice" (as *The Times* described it), or a "cup" (*The Daily Telegraph*), or a "bowl" (*The Sun*). This method was judged by some wags as superior to the one that selected the wrong Miliband to lead the Labour Party. "The idea behind it is to invoke divine intervention," a Coptic human-rights advocate told *The Guardian* at the time, "Which doesn't fit with the concept of a democratic election."

Only seven months later, there was Pope Tawadros in his armchair beside General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, in uniform, speaking. As Trevor Mostyn noted in last week's *Tablet*, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar was there too – a figure respected beyond Egypt. On the general's other side was Mohamed El Baradei, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate. "Mohamed El Baradei was last night due to be sworn in as Egypt's interim Prime Minister," reported *The Independent on Sunday* afterwards, in one of those despatches that is either telling the readers something they know already, or something that turns out not to be true. In this case it was the latter.

I mention that, not in mockery, but to illustrate that none of us knows what is going to happen in Egypt. The miserably deteriorating state of the Middle East is notable for wrong-footing Western commentators.

Naturally, it hadn't escaped the notice of the Muslim Brotherhood in July that Pope Tawadros had sat in at the general's broadcast. "One of the movement's leaders lashed out at

Pope Tawadros II at a rally," reported *The Independent* five days later. The lasher-out was Mohammed Badie, the "Supreme Guide" of the Muslim Brotherhood, now awaiting trial. His opinion of the army coup was startlingly eloquent, judging by a report on the website of Al Arabiya, the Saudi-owned news channel, on 25 July: "I swear by God that what al-Sisi did in Egypt is more criminal than if he had carried an axe and demolished the holy Kaaba, stone by stone." I wonder whether "axe" was the right translation, or perhaps "crowbar". In any case, the remark is all the more arresting if, as Mohammed Badie does, you believe in God, who takes notice of oaths, and you have a habitual interest in the moral status of acts.

Last weekend in *The Sunday Times* a despatch from Hala Jaber reported the destruction of the church of the Virgin Mary at al-Nala, 60 miles from Cairo, as seen by a 10-year-old boy. "They burnt down the front door, then stormed into the church shouting 'Allahu akbar,'" he said. "My family and I started calling for them to stop. We beg you, what you are doing is *haram*." It did no good.

A more successful intervention in a matter of life and death grasped public attention last week in another continent. Antoinette Tuff, the bookkeeper at a school in Decatur, Georgia, negotiated the peaceful surrender of a heavily armed gunman holding her hostage and threatening the lives of the children. Listeners to BBC Radio 4's *Today* caught up with her story through a three-minute slice of her 40-minute three-cornered conversation with the deranged man and the emergency services.

In an opinion piece on the incident in *The Guardian*, it was telling that Gary Younge, who confesses to having "stopped caring" about religion, singled out the point that "it was in and through her faith that Tuff drew the strength to deal with the situation". This, he suggested, challenged the fashion "among those who think themselves progressive in Europe, to disparage not just faith but the faithful (with particular disdain reserved for Islam)".

In the online version of Younge's piece, a link was inserted to a tweet by Richard Dawkins rubbishing the journalist Mehdi Hasan because "he admits to believing Muhamed flew to heaven on a winged horse". But I wonder if Younge wasn't also thinking of some colleagues nearer his journalistic home.

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