

## CREATIO CONTINUA CONFERENCE

*The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow and Laudato Si Movement Poland*

2-3 December 2022

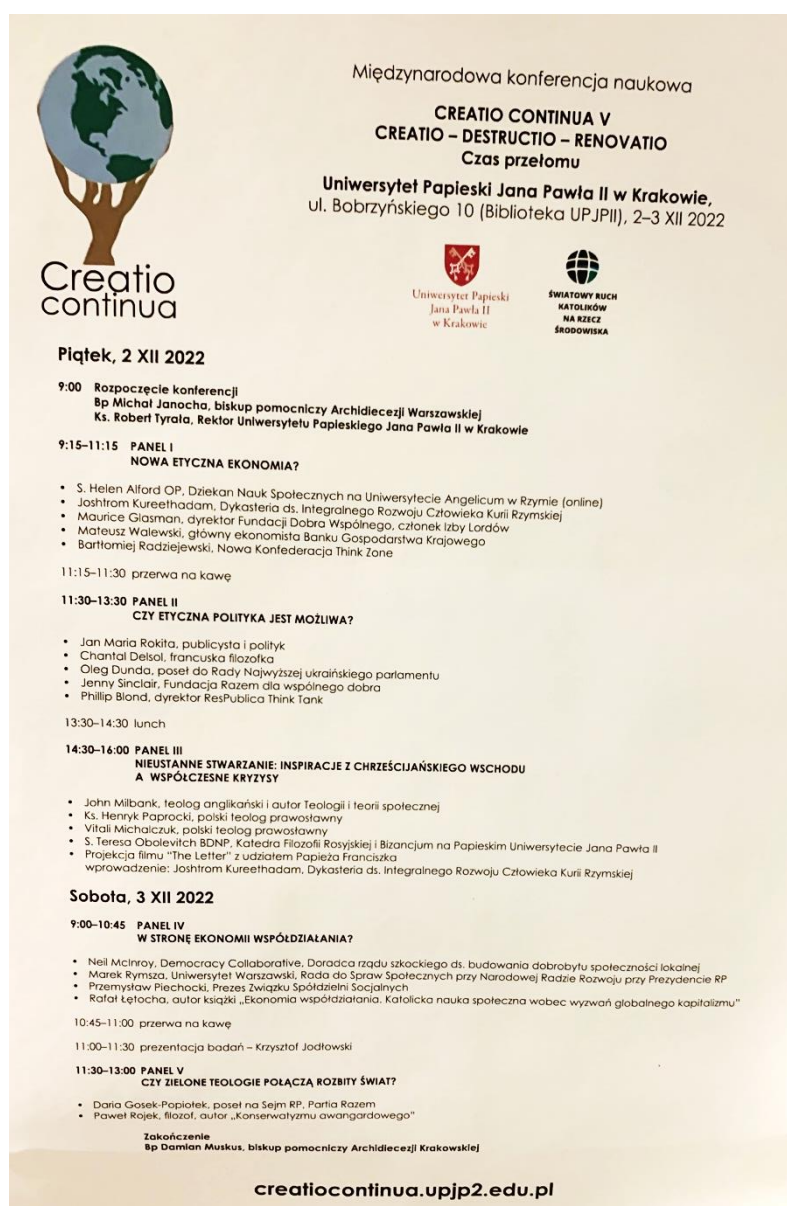
### PANEL II: IS ETHICAL POLITICS POSSIBLE?

Jan Maria Rokita, Polish politician, columnist for "Political Theology"

Chantal Delsol, French Philosopher

Phillip Blond, Director, Respublica


Jenny Sinclair, Director, Together for the Common Good




Międzynarodowa konferencja naukowa

**CREATIO CONTINUA V**  
**CREATIO – DESTRUCTIO – RENOVATIO**  
Czas przełomu

Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie,  
Ul. Bobrzyńskiego 10 (Biblioteka UPJPII), 2–3 XII 2022

 Uniwersytet Papieski  
Jana Pawła II  
w Krakowie

 ŚWIATOWY RUCH  
KATOLIKÓW  
NA RZECZ  
ŚRODOWISKA

**Creatio continua**

**Piątek, 2 XII 2022**

9:00 Rozpoczęcie konferencji  
Bp Michał Janocha, biskup pomocniczy Archidiecezji Warszawskiej  
Ks. Robert Tyrła, Rektor Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II w Krakowie

9:15–11:15 **PANEL I**  
**NOWA ETYCZNA EKONOMIA?**

- S. Helen Alford OP, Dziekan Nauk Społecznych na Uniwersytecie Angelicum w Rzymie (online)
- Jashtram Kureethadam, Dykasteria ds. Integralnego Rozwoju Człowieka Kurii Rzymskiej
- Maurice Glasman, dyrektor Fundacji Dobra Wspólnego, członek Izby Lordów
- Mateusz Walewski, główny ekonomista Banku Gospodarstwa Krajowego
- Bartłomiej Radziejewski, Nowa Konfederacja Think Zone

11:15–11:30 przerwa na kawę

11:30–13:30 **PANEL II**  
**CZY ETYCZNA POLITYKA JEST MOŻLIWA?**

- Jan Maria Rokita, publicysta i polityk
- Chantal Delsol, francuska filozofka
- Oleg Dunda, poseł do Rady Najwyższej ukraińskiego parlamentu
- Jenny Sinclair, Fundacja Razem dla wspólnego dobra
- Phillip Blond, dyrektor ResPublica Think Tank

13:30–14:30 lunch

14:30–16:00 **PANEL III**  
**NIEUSTANNE STWARZANIE: INSPIRACJE Z CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKIEGO WSCHODU  
A WSPÓŁCZESNE KRYZYSY**

- John Milbank, teolog anglikański i autor Teologii i teorii społecznej
- Ks. Henryk Paprocki, polski teolog prawosławny
- Witold Michalczyk, polski teolog prawosławny
- S. Teresa Obsolesvich BSNP, Katedra Filozofii Rosyjskiej i Bizancjum na Papieskim Uniwersytecie Jana Pawła II
- Projekcja filmu "The Letter" z udziałem Papieża Franciszka

wprowadzenie: Jashtram Kureethadam, Dykasteria ds. Integralnego Rozwoju Człowieka Kurii Rzymskiej

**Sobota, 3 XII 2022**

9:00–10:45 **PANEL IV**  
**W STRONĘ EKONOMII WSPÓŁDZIAŁANIA?**

- Neil McInroy, Democracy Collaborative, Doradca rządu szkockiego ds. budowania dobrobytu społecznej lokalnej
- Marek Rymasz, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Rada do Spraw Społecznych przy Narodowej Radzie Rozwoju przy Prezydencji RP
- Przemysław Piechocki, Prezes Związku Spółdzielni Społecznych
- Rafał Łętocha, autor książki „Ekonomia współdziałania. Katolicka nauka społeczna wobec wyzwań globalnego kapitalizmu”

10:45–11:00 przerwa na kawę

11:00–11:30 prezentacja badań – Krzysztof Jodłowski

11:30–13:00 **PANEL V**  
**CZY ZIELONE TELOGIE POŁĄCZA ROZBITY ŚWIAT?**

- Daria Gosek-Popiołek, poseł na Sejm RP, Partia Razem
- Paweł Rójek, filozof, autor „Konserwatyizmu awangardowego”

Zakończenie  
Bp Damian Muskus, biskup pomocniczy Archidiecezji Krakowskiej

[creatiocontinua.upjp2.edu.pl](http://creatiocontinua.upjp2.edu.pl)

Hello everyone. It's really an honour to be here. Thank you for the invitation. If I may, I am going to take a quite different approach from my fellow panellists.

**A politics of abandonment or relationship?**

I want to start by taking you to a cold dark winter morning in London. An old man is shopping in a small supermarket. But his basket is empty. As he leaves the shop, the security guard challenges him and his bag falls open: a few tins and packets fall to the floor. The guard roughs him up. The police are called. This old boy was hungry, and he stole because he couldn't afford to eat. And he was met with violence.

Why, in a cultural moment where there is so much public anger, is such suffering ignored? What is happening where there is more outrage about issues of sexuality than there is about the discarding of human beings?

We hear a lot about "values" and about "human dignity" but these words can easily remain abstract. In fact, we have had a forty year period in which the reality is the mass abandonment of whole communities, sacrificed for shareholder interest.

We have been in a kind of dream - anesthetized to avert our eyes from what is going on.

Many countries have got stuck in narrow economic and social logic that has generated an unethical and dysfunctional system that generates human distress, loneliness, atomisation and a collapse of social trust.

We fell for the big bright shiny thing - and it delivered prosperity for some - but it turned out to produce a dysfunctional and expensive state, a private sector dependent on low wages, civic degradation and a settlement of increasing inequality that generates problems that the state ends up trying and failing to tackle. It's massively weakened the family, community, local institutions - the things that give stability and meaning.

For a long time it was as if there was no other way. And now that it is unravelling, the alternatives are increasingly extreme. The choices before us appear to be a deracinated liberalism or a Marxism that wants to destroy tradition.

But we who are here today are called to tell a different story: economically, socially, spiritually.

We are called to build an ethical politics of relationship, mutuality and common good.

We can articulate what the characteristics of this politics need to be. What we do not need is a progressive utopian dream, a cultural revolution, a faith in trickle-down economics or a technocracy.

What is necessary for an ethical politics is a grounded approach built upon a true anthropology, shaped by a rigorous non-partisan framework.

## **Ethics**

But first: what do we mean by ethics? These days the meaning of words is constantly shifting and terms we used to trust are being hijacked, so we have to be clear what we mean.

By ethics I do not mean "values" as is deployed in a million mission statements.

I do not mean ethics in the sense of a set of secular humanist opinions that are falsely claimed to be "neutral".

And I do not mean ethics in the sense of well-behaved politicians. We have plenty of technocrats who are regarded as "grown-ups", who are seen as "competent", but who actually don't realise they are exacerbating the dysfunctionality. But equally, it must be said, some badly behaved politicians have on occasion instinctively understood an ethical politics very well. All is not what it seems.

I would prefer to define ethical behaviour as perhaps something like "when we care about that which is precious to God."

But for this we need a theology and a framework. A framework to help us reform a politics that causes violence to an old man who is lonely and hungry. A framework that can also inform a virtuous statecraft. A framework that helps us get out of structures of sin, and build structures of grace.

## **The Framework of Catholic Social Thought**

Catholic Social Thought helps us with this. It is too little known, and often rendered too theoretical. But properly understood, its framework can help us build the Kingdom.

Catholic Social Thought does not reduce the complexity of human motivations to materialistic interests, and is typically sceptical of doctrines and practices that do. By contrast, it proposes a multi-layered conception of reality, in which human cooperation is integrated with God's continuous creation of the world.

Catholic Social Thought is centred on a theology of the human person - the inverse of the dysfunctional system we've got. Our theology is based on an anthropology that recognises the Primacy of God as opposed to the primacy of self. From this, we understand the Earth and the Cosmos to be God's world, His domain, and that our identity as human beings is in God. From this we get the *Imago Dei* - that we're made in the image of God, the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. And from this, we get that the human person has a transcendent dimension.

So it follows that we are transcendent, relational beings. We are not atomised individuals to be catalogued according to skin colour and gender. Everyone is born into a family, the fundamental building block of society. And living in relationship with our neighbours, embedded in a physical place, creates the bedrock of community, within which we find meaning and belonging.

This relational aspect of our identity is key to Catholic Social Thought. Together, with the wide diversity of our combined gifts, we are called to participate in God's work of "transforming" material reality.

The themes of Catholic Social Thought are broad, and its practical vision is rooted in Scripture and grounded in real life.

Sometimes called the theology of the Holy Spirit in practice, it emphatically does not propose a theocracy or an integralism that argues for a Catholic authoritarian state. Rather it supports a pluralism and a common good of different identities and interests.

Catholic Social Thought is more often drawn upon for its support for life issues, the culture of life vs the culture of death, and its engagement with bioethics. But we must not capitulate to the privatising of this great tradition: its worldview is concerned with all of life.

### **Capital and Labour**

At the heart of Catholic Social Thought is the tension between capital and labour.

Catholic Social Thought argues for the importance of work and the dignity of labour. This is because work is more than a way to make a living, it gives life meaning and it is how we shape the world.

At the same time, the Catholic Social Thought framework helps us identify the tendency of capital to commodify and dehumanise, to threaten the integrity of the human person. Successive governments across the West have been too comfortable with unconstrained capital.

And therefore a Catholic Social Thought-inspired ethical politics argues for constraints on capital, and a negotiated settlement between capital and labour. A settlement involving trades unions, workers on boards, a living wage and so on.

Its preferential option for the poor makes us pay special attention to the working class and to poor, abandoned communities.

But not out of pity. No, we must do so because our analysis will be impoverished without the insight of those who did not profit from globalisation, those who were not anaesthetized. We are all members of one body. They knew the devastation was real because they were living it. As their infrastructure degraded, as their jobs were moved overseas, and as they were humiliated and labelled bigoted for not wanting to give up the things they valued, like wanting to stay where they belonged. Their distress was a red flag alerting us to a dysfunctional system. But they were ignored, even held in contempt, by the "competent" people.

So the communities who have suffered in this way - in our post-industrial and coastal towns, and in pockets of our inner cities and outer estates - may in fact be best equipped in terms of a resistance to the hyper liberal agenda. To build an ethical politics, their voices must be heard and their power restored. The same may apply to other groups in society who've also not been anaesthetised.

### **Subsidiarity**

Within Catholic Social Thought, Subsidiarity is a key principle. It holds that decisions should always be taken closest to those they affect, and a central authority should not do things that can be done at a local level. It requires distribution of power and careful discernment about what decisions should be taken at what level. Its purpose is to prevent dominance, uphold the human person, and strengthen human agency.

In policy terms then, this means state power must be distributed not centralised, and reform must be through democracy not revolution, nor by imposition through legalistic forms without democratic accountability.

So in practice it requires a multiple layering of responsibility, distributed vertically as appropriate, at national, regional, local levels, and further, at community, neighbourhood, family, individual level.

Subsidiarity requires each of us participating freely, contributing to the common good according to our unique vocational responsibility.

It works at international level too: power should not be centralised globally but distributed, through strong, local, regional and national institutions and through an international solidarity between institutions of different nationalities across borders.

But Subsidiarity works horizontally as well. It requires institutions to help each other fulfil their unique purpose. This relational power builds greater social resilience. Distributed leadership and power provides greater resistance to the dominance of capital.

But often civil servants don't want to devolve power and privately say they fear increased agency at local level. Fear of ordinary people is a warning sign that power has become too centralised and betrays a desire for a technocracy that undermines democratic processes.

The exercise of sovereignty in terms of conscience is an important component in Catholic Social Thought. It is realistic about human beings' flaws and tendencies but at the same time Subsidiarity requires that people should be trusted to take responsibility. Let us not forget TS Eliot's warning of creating "systems so perfect that no one needs to be good." Trust the people.

## **Place**

It's important to say that Subsidiarity draws us to the significance that Catholic Social Thought places on particularity and place. There is a profound ethical reason for this: through place there is both real accountability and the ability to uphold the transcendent nature of the human being.

In upholding Subsidiarity we are allowing God's grace to flow through that person's life. People live in places. We are not virtual. We are physical, embodied beings, while also having a transcendent dimension. And so an ethical politics must engage with a theology of place.

As we move through this volatile new era, we must hold the tension between global and local. Increasing global instability and international crises around food and energy supply chains mean life will be harder for many families. We may now have to adopt an attitude of "tragic realism" but there are new opportunities too.

The global imperative to act on climate is clear, but this must be balanced by local agency and solidarity. To uphold the dignity of the human person, local democratic processes must not be subordinated to legalistic or authoritarian forms. An environmental activism that fails to engage with local interests and the democratic agency of the communities affected will be divisive and will fail to gain majority support.

This tension between the grounded and the metaphysical points to Catholic social thought's "integral ecology" that seeks to balance the interests of the natural world with peoples' livelihoods. Climate change measures therefore need to be balanced with the concerns of people, place and work. This requires a serious green industrial strategy. In the absence of such a strategy, we risk colluding with the politics of abandonment, division and transaction, and perpetuating the dysfunctionality.

## The vocation of the Church in the new era

As Pope Francis said seven years ago, this is not an era of change but a change of era.

And when we think about this new politics, we do also need to think about the calling of the Church at this time and about Christianity in the public square.

Many churches in the West are in rapid decline. With increasingly dominant hyper-liberal norms in Europe, even in Catholic Poland you are fighting a war of attrition. There are signs that you are losing young people and women. Churches increasingly in the West have been marginalised, relegated to the private domain.

And yet churches have an important role to play, indeed a vital and legitimate civic vocation: to be the embodiment of love in a desecrated world.

The survival - and indeed the revival - of the church depends on local relationships and a recognition of the importance of place.

Some church leaders in the UK confidently talk about human dignity in terms of family and pro-life issues. Others talk about refugees and welfare benefits. But few engage with key themes in Catholic social teaching such as work and the dignity of labour. Few offer resistance to the dehumanising tendency of capital. Few mention distribution of power and the importance of local agency.

A Church informed by Catholic Social Thought needs to have a broader focus than just life issues, vital though they are, and uphold the dignity of the person *throughout life*. It is not either/or, but both/and. That means concerns about the dignity of work, agency and power, purposeful business, housing, education, citizenship and place.

What might this kind of church leadership look like?

I will give you two examples from the UK:

In 1889, two church leaders in East London, one Catholic and one Protestant, worked together to negotiate the end of the great dock strike, standing in solidarity with the dockers whose employment was so unreliable their families starved. The two men understood capital's tendency to exploit and dehumanise and they helped the dockers negotiate better pay and conditions. The [joint leadership](#) of Cardinal Manning and William Booth influenced Pope Leo XIII ahead of the first encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. Catholic Social Thought is always grounded in real places.

A century later, two bishops in Liverpool in the 1980s, one Catholic and one Protestant, worked together to enable the leadership of local people to build new civic institutions. Archbishop Derek Worlock and Bishop David Sheppard also [convened](#) a private breakfast group, over a 13 year period, of the major employers in the region to retain investment and save jobs, securing the livelihoods of thousands of families. The two bishops also defeated a bitter historic sectarianism. They invited Pope St John Paul II to visit Liverpool to see this spiritual and civic renewal for himself. His historic arrival on British soil was the first papal visit to the UK since the Reformation.

## Leadership

So what kind of leadership do we need from the Church in the public square in this moment?

The concerns of the Church are what is needed for a community to flourish. A holistic narrative valuing the whole of life is required. A narrative on life issues, sexuality or welfare benefits is vital but incomplete. Church leaders need to engage seriously in the public square to call out the failings of the neoliberal system which is degrading human beings and nature, and to articulate a better way, to talk about the need for a green industrial policy, decentralised government upholding self-determination and agency at local level and incentives to place-based investment.

The Church has a legitimate voice and the language of the Kingdom which can inspire and shape the political space. It should not be shy to talk about love, covenant and the life of the Spirit. Catholic social thought can equip church leaders with a vocabulary to speak in spiritual terms about the importance of the dignity of work, family life and the reordering of the economy. Church leaders should engage seriously with civic neighbours and convene conversations to envisage what is needed to bring forth the Kingdom in their particular area. This is not utopian. Building the common good is messier and more beautifully human than any utopian ideal could be.

The preferential option for the poor requires the Church to adopt an ethical politics of solidarity with poor communities, and areas that have been left behind as other parts of the country have forged ahead. But it is vital not to take over, not to speak *for* people. In the UK, when politicians, Church leaders and activists say they are a 'voice for the voiceless', they are sometimes betraying a deeply ingrained patrician position that believes working-class or poor people are unable to speak for themselves.

Instead the gift of the Church is to listen to the men and women living in poor communities and enable their leadership, to offer genuine accompaniment, love, respect and reciprocity. Together, they can build up local power, for example in local energy, housing and land trusts and associations led and governed by local people. In these kinds of scenarios, the Church can be a constructive partner alongside its neighbours.

### **A politics of relationship**

After decades of globalisation, one of the key components of an ethical politics is a commitment to building relationships in the local. Repairing torn social fabric is more important than it might seem. After years of individualistic culture propagated by neoliberalism, loving friendship and the one to one conversation are necessary to rebuild social trust. Relationship is a major theme throughout Catholic social thought.

*"All the members of the body, though many, are one body." (1 Cor: 12).*

In an unstable and uncertain world, churches have a distinctive and sacred calling. It is time to re-dedicate the Church to spiritual and social renewal, to be suspicious of technocrats who have confused ethics with efficiency, to build covenantal relationships with people and place, to resist and reject the tribalism of the activist extremes by building bridges.

To collaborate with God in the building of the Kingdom, we must build alliances of social peace - across class, across ethnicity, across opinion. Rather than submit to identity categories, an ethical politics requires us to build a common good between estranged interests and identities - whether rural and urban, men and women, black and white, old and young, business and unions, affluent and poor, educated and uneducated, faith and secular, capital and labour.

This is patient and unglamorous work and often requires skilful negotiation. Research by American psychologist [Jonathan Haidt](#) has shown the importance of engaging with different opinions and says that this leads to better solutions. He says it is in fact essential for the survival of the species.

In the *Solidarność* movement you had an ethical politics focused on the dignity of the person, which integrated a balance of interests, the importance of decent work and human agency. It was a politics of human relationships and mutuality - a politics of the common good. Then like most of the West, you got caught up in the temptations of the neoliberal philosophy, which generates structures of sin.

We are learning that our misadventure into neoliberalism has caused human and civic degradation on a massive scale. It is now unravelling and we can no longer afford to continue living under an anaesthesia that generates so much unnecessary suffering.

It is not too late to rediscover your great tradition. The framework of Catholic Social Thought can inform an ethical politics that goes with the grain of how human beings live and what they actually want. We, the People of God, are called to build structures of grace.

**Jenny Sinclair**

Founder Director

Together for the Common Good

<https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/>