

Catholic Social Thought and Our Calling

Thank you so much for this warm welcome. So just before I start, let me tell you just a little about my background. I grew up in the Anglican Christian tradition and converted to Catholicism in my mid-twenties. I am the daughter of a Church of England clergyman, David Sheppard.ⁱ We lived in the East End of London where my father was a vicar, and then in Liverpool where he was a bishop - where he formed a ground-breaking ecumenical partnership with the Catholic Archbishop, Derek Worlock. They stood up for the city at a time of great division and instability and worked to strengthen communities. I didn't enjoy being a bishop's daughter, to be frank I was a rebel, and in my teens, I became estranged from the Church. Then when I was twenty six, I had a powerful conversion experience and was received into the Catholic Church, much against everybody's expectations. It wasn't until much later, in 2011, in my late forties, that I had a sense of calling and I started Together for the Common Good.

There are many ways to discover Catholic Social Thought. There are different ways to teach it. There are different interpretations. People draw on it for different purposes and from a range of different angles. So tonight, I am aiming to give you a sense of the Spirit of Catholic Social Thought. At this time of intense political and social instability, I hope to show you how it can resource us in terms of spiritual and civic renewal. We'll explore:

- How this tradition resources us in our calling, how it offers us a framework for good judgement that is aligned with our faith, rooted in the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
- How it helps us read the signs of the times and how as a theology of the Holy Spirit, it empowers us to shape the world according to God's worldview.
- We'll look at how it helps us as we are called in our own unique ways, to participate in the realising of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness, the Kingdom of God.
- We will explore how the Lord is calling each of us into participation with Him to meet the needs of the world, to join with Him in this process of social and spiritual renewal.

The Importance of Catholic Social Thought

Well as you know this extraordinary body of thinking is profoundly informed by Scripture and is intended as a framework for good judgement.

It's often called a hidden gem - in fact it's a bit too well hidden - most Catholics are not familiar with it. It is often rendered too theoretical. It does not cascade down. It's far too dense for most people, or, it gets over simplified and aspects are co-opted to serve particular interests. But properly understood it is non-partisan. And it is the most fabulous and exciting body of thinking.

It is a framework that can help us build the Kingdom. Its stated purpose is for a civilisation of love. It is intended as a gift to all people of goodwill, not just for Catholics. It is sometimes called theology of the Holy Spirit in practice. Such a posture is asking us to see it as an integral part of our faith, not as an optional extra.

So let's ground this in reality.

I want to take 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.

Now, faced with such a situation, some of us think of works of charity; others think of politics. But in terms of our identity as the baptised - as children of our Heavenly Father - everything and everyone that is His, also belongs to us. We have a calling and a responsibility to each other and for the world.

We need a frame that enables us to understand the world - the whole of life - through a holistic lens - if you like, a political and charity lens at the same time. This is where the tradition helps us - as it draws on scripture, reason, and the unrivalled grounded experience of the Church across the world. It is vital that we understand the elements of the teaching that pertain to the common good. That's what particularly interests me.

We hear a lot about "values" and about "human dignity" these days but these words are abstract and so are often misinterpreted, rendered meaningless or hijacked, or worse. So in a cultural moment where there is so much public anger, we might ask why the suffering of that old man is ignored?

What is happening where there is more outrage about issues of sexuality than there is about the discarding of human beings? In fact, that suffering is ignored because we have had a forty year period where we have been in a kind of dream - anesthetized to avert our eyes from what is going on.

As the rigorous analysis that the Catholic Social Thought lens reveals for us, this dream has been obscuring a reality which in fact has involved the mass abandonment of whole communities, sacrificed for shareholder interest. It is a dream that has allowed a hyper liberal ideology to colonise our institutions.

This reading comes from a Catholic understanding of political economy, that is, the way we organise the way we live - socially, economically, politically - all the aspects that shape the world we live in. This way of seeing is at the heart of the gift of what this tradition provides for us. It provides a gospel-rooted interpretation of God's view of the world. God cares about every aspect of our lives.

Its concerns are always focused on what is happening to the human being and the natural world, on upholding the flourishing of the human person, of families and communities. And so, this tradition is concerned with the whole of life, not only with life issues, but also with human agency, social organization, democracy, the dignity of labour, the just economy, social peace. Because these

elements shape the conditions of life. And so this way of thinking calls us to build a political economy of relationship, mutuality and common good.

This lens helps us see the condition of that old man in context. We can see that our country has got stuck in a narrow economic and social logic that generates human distress, loneliness and atomisation - which by the way is higher among the young than the old - and a collapse of social trust.

Most countries in the West 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 more and more problems that the state ends up trying and failing to tackle. It's led to the devaluing not only of the unborn but also of the living, it has undermined the family, fractured communities, eviscerated local institutions - all the things that give stability and meaning.

For a long time it was as if there was no other way. But now it is unravelling. The alternatives are increasingly extreme. The choices before us are currently a deracinated liberalism or a totalitarian progressivism that wants to destroy tradition.

But as Catholics and Christians, we are called to tell a different story: economically and socially as well as spiritually. And renewal is possible. It doesn't have to be like this. Catholic Social Thought helps us articulate what the characteristics of this different story need to be like. What we do not need is a progressive utopian dream, or a cultural revolution, or a faith in trickle-down economics, or a technocracy.

What Catholic Social Thought is Not

But this tradition is not proposing a return to some past Christendom, let alone a theocracy or an integralism that argues for a Catholic authoritarian state. Nor some kind of religious triumphalism which will only provoke a worse reaction. Some Catholic thinkers in the United States go too far on this, which risks provoking an equal and opposite reaction. Rather - it supports a pluralism and a common good of different identities and interests. It's realistic about the way people live.

And it's clear about the role of the Church in the world: it upholds principles but is not prescriptive about policy: the laity is responsible for matters of statecraft, not the Church.

Catholic Social Thought is ambitious and visionary, but it's emphatically not utopian: it recognises human life is necessarily messier and more beautifully human than any utopia could be.

For this renewal to happen we need a grounded approach, a theology and a framework to help us reform a system that causes violence to an old man who is lonely and hungry. A framework that is built around a true anthropology and natural law. A framework that provides us with the theological tools to think through the complexity and design a virtuous statecraft. A framework that also calls the People of God to grow into a Church which nourishes relationship, mutuality and common good. A framework that calls the Church to be a bulwark against individualism. A framework that helps us step out of structures of sin, and build structures of grace.

Our Identity in God

Let's look at what underpins this framework. This is a tradition that does not reduce the complexity of human motivations to materialistic interests, and which 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 transcendent, 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. Currently we've got it the wrong way up. 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, the Son, the Holy Spirit. And from this, we get that the human person has a transcendent dimension.

A really helpful aspect to the understanding of this anthropology is a concept known as personalism. "*Personalism*" said John Paul II, "*states that the person is the kind of good which ...cannot be treated as an object of use....the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love.*"ⁱⁱⁱ

Being made in the image of God means we are not atomised individuals to be catalogued according to skin colour or 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.

So it follows, as in the Trinity, that we are social, transcendent, relational beings. We are in relationship with all of creation and with God. The tradition has a concept called "integral ecology" - which was set out in *Laudato Si*ⁱⁱⁱ just a few years ago - we relate to the natural world as God's gift, but never as an enemy to human flourishing. So for example it would reject the anti-human tendencies found in elements of environmental activism, and instead call for a balance between people and planet.

This relational aspect of our identity in God is key. Together, with the wide diversity of our combined gifts, we are called to participate in God's work of "transforming" material reality. This is the conceptual framework that must underpin a healthy political economy.

All of Life

Its principles are often drawn upon by those involved with life issues and bioethics: sometimes referred to as the culture of life vs the culture of death^{iv} - issues to do with the family, abortion, contraception, euthanasia and so on. This is very important. But the secular humanist media wants the Church to "stay in our lane" by encouraging a focus on these topics, because it serves their interests to frame the Church as obsessed with the private domain.

The tradition is also drawn upon by those concerned with social action, care for creation, human rights, refugees, destitution and welfare benefits. It is equally important for the Church to voice concern on such matters, although sometimes supporting these mainstream social issues makes the Church vulnerable to instrumentalisation by campaigners, or give the impression it endorses society.

However, few leaders in the Church engage with the key themes of the tradition that relate to political economy.^v Few are prepared - or perhaps even realise the importance of it - to offer resistance to the dehumanising tendencies of capital and state when they have too much power. Few mention the dysfunctional nature of a neoliberal economy or the importance of upholding the dignity of labour. Few mention the distribution of power and capital, democracy and the upholding of local agency, of purposeful business, citizenship and place. And yet the encyclicals^{vi} place a central importance on these aspects which fundamentally shape our experience of life. This worldview actually calls us to uphold the dignity of the person throughout all aspects of human life. We are not supposed to cherry pick parts of the teaching and ignore the rest. It's not just the beginning and the end of life that are important, it's all of it in between as well.

Capital and Labour

I would like to say something about the heart of this tradition which is the tension between capital and labour. It argues for a balance between them. It emphasises the importance of work and the dignity of labour.^{vii} This is because the work of human beings is about more than a way to make a living. Within the Catholic tradition, work is seen as something that gives life meaning and through which we help to shape the world.

At the same time, the framework helps us to identify the tendency of capital (that is, big money, the concentrated power of money) to commodify (that is to turn human beings and the natural world into products that can be bought and sold), exploit and extract. This tendency to dehumanise workers is a tendency of capital when it's not constrained and it threatens the integrity of the human person.

To defend the dignity of human beings, the Catholic worldview argues for constraints on capital, and that involves a negotiated settlement between capital and labour, in other words, a balance of power. That would mean for example, a settlement involving trades unions, workers on boards, a living wage and so on. But successive governments of all stripes across the West have been too comfortable with unconstrained capital. Without constraints, capital generates not only wealth, but vast inequalities, low wage economies and all the social problems that flow from poverty.

Catholic Social Thought's preferential option for the poor insists on putting people on low incomes first. Here, "the poor" refers not just to the destitute, but to poor and working class communities (of all ethnicities) around the world, and to the places abandoned by capital. So all people who are poor warrant our attention.

But not out of pity. No, we must do so because we are all members of one body. If parts of the body are neglected, the whole body is impoverished. Without the insight of those who did not profit from globalisation, those who were not anaesthetized, the picture is missing a critical part of the story. They knew the devastation was real because they were living it.^{viii} Those in the affluent world didn't notice as the infrastructure in poor places degraded, in the northern post-industrial towns for example, as jobs were moved overseas, and as communities were humiliated and labelled bigoted for not wanting to give up the things they valued, like wanting to stay where they belonged. Their anger and distress was a red flag raising an alert about 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 - which are invisible to people who live affluent lives - 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.

Common Good

I want to clarify what Catholic Social Thought means by "the common good": it is often misunderstood. People project onto it what they want it to mean: 'social justice', 'fairness', 'solidarity', 'equality', or some kind of utopia. It's none of those things.

The classic definition is "the set of conditions in which human beings flourish." But that is a very general description and can be abstract and it is vulnerable to misinterpretation.

From our understanding of the tradition, we describe the common good like this:

"the shared life of a society in which everyone can flourish - as we act together in different ways that all contribute towards that goal, enabled by social conditions that mean every single person can participate. We create these conditions and pursue that goal by working together across our differences, each of us taking responsibility according to our calling and ability." (T4CG)^{ix}

So, common good is about upholding the human space. It's about agency. It's about balancing people's interests without excluding. It's the recognition of a settled pluralism of identities and interests.

The tradition insists that reform must be through democracy and (unlike Liberation Theology^x) not through revolution, not by imposition through legalistic forms either. Frameworks of democratic accountability are central.

Subsidiarity: Levels of Responsibility

So now let's think about accountability in terms of responsibility. The principle of subsidiarity is very important, because it helps us locate responsibility at the appropriate level. Its purpose is to uphold the integrity of the human being and prevent domination.

Its definition is expressed in these terms *"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."* So for example when you're raising a child, you teach them to tie their shoelaces, but once they can do it, you don't keep doing it for them. Responsibility should be taken in accordance with ability. Decisions should always be taken closest to those they affect.

But subsidiarity is often overlooked or misunderstood. It requires distribution of power and careful discernment about what decisions should be taken at what level. This is especially relevant in this post-Covid period where many central governments are becoming over-centralised.

In terms of political economy then, the subsidiarity principle insists that power must be distributed. What would that look like in real terms? Well it should manifest in a multiple layering, for example:

At international level: power should not be centralised globally but distributed, through strong, local, regional and national institutions, through an international solidarity between institutions of

different nationalities across borders. In this sense, the subsidiarity principle supports the argument for Brexit, because the structures of the EU became centralised, imperialist and supranational. Unlike the founding vision which was predicated upon the principle of subsidiarity, in practice, that dream became inverted and the interests of capital came to be dominant.

At national level: Catholic Social Thought generally calls for conditions in which capital and administrative power is distributed and not centralised. However, for some key things, it is appropriate to have a centralised government policy. For example, an industrial strategy (which was not possible when the UK was within the EU) is necessary to foster an effective integral ecology. In practice this might look like incentivising green industry and place-based investment linked with a national training and education strategy, so that families and communities are sustained, and so people can stay where they belong and not be forced to move.

At regional level: we would see regional banking, energy trusts, and regional governance of energy supply, greater collaboration, say, between higher education institutions, technology colleges, large employers, dioceses, religious associations, chambers of commerce – all collaborating towards the economic renewal of their region.

On a more local level: Catholic Social Thought leads us to ask questions, for example, if a business remunerates its employees fairly, are their jobs stable, or are they on zero hours contracts (you can't raise a family on a zero hours contract), are they fulfilling, are they dignified, does the CEO and do the cleaners know each other by name? Is there a mutually respectful relationship? These are the kinds of questions that the framework prompts us to ask.

While government and policy have an important role (Catholic Social Thought is not pro the small state, just as it is not pro the centralised state), the common good requires responsibility being taken at all levels of society. It requires each of us - as individuals and as organisations, businesses, institutions - contributing freely according to our unique vocational responsibility.

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

Local Institutions

The tradition has a special role for what it calls intermediary institutions - by that we mean bodies such as clubs, football clubs, businesses, associations, regional banks, mutuals, charities, local employers, places of worship, guilds, hospices, credit unions, universities, community trusts, schools and so on. In a healthy city or town you'd have a thick layer of those institutions. But in a place that's been abandoned, all that is left might be a high street with a chicken shop, a pawn shop and a betting shop. So the tradition encourages the building up of that layer so as to have a variety of local institutions, creating a rich civic ecology.

Now churches have a distinctive calling^{xi} here and are much more effective when they work together. Churches can be part of the reweaving, bringing neighbouring institutions together. This creates a relational power that builds greater social resilience. Good local leadership and relational

power generates greater resistance to the dominance of capital (money power) and the centralised state. The purpose of this is to uphold the human person.

As John Paul II said in *Laborum Exercens*, (the encyclical focusing on the dignity of work), we need:

"a wide range of intermediate bodies with economic, social and cultural purposes; they would be bodies enjoying real autonomy with regard to the public powers, pursuing their specific aims in honest collaboration with each other and in subordination to the demands of the common good."^{xii}

So Catholic Social Thought has this very powerful vision of a rich civic ecology where everyone plays their part. We can help by doing our bit: we can look in places where we live and see where institutions are strong, weak, where they need help and where they can work together. What is needed is institutions that are rooted, which exist for the benefit of the area, which have local governance and leadership, which bind people together, which help people find meaning and purpose. Whether it is through work, volunteering, socialising or playing sport, participation in a local institution can help a person find purpose. This "layer" is sometimes referred to as the level of civil society and its relational power acts as a buffer against the centralising, totalising, dehumanising forces of both the bureaucratic state and big money power.

So we are moving further down, from international, national, regional, local, and now to the family.

The Family and Conscience

The family as you know in the Catholic tradition has a very special role, it is vital for the formation of the person, so the family should not be usurped by the power of the state. It is the fundamental building block of society.

And within the family we have the level of the individual, the person, you and me - we can each play our part as moral actors, through the decisions we take, through our relationships, through putting common good principles into practice in our everyday lives.

Subsidiarity requires each of us participating freely, so the principle of human freedom is central.^{xiii} We need to be able to contribute to the common good without coercion, according to our unique vocational responsibility. The Holy Spirit works through our lives and so the exercise of sovereignty in terms of conscience is a central component in Catholic Social Thought.

Rights without responsibilities can lead only to coercion, and then division and resentment, and eventually a battle of all against all, threatening social peace, which is what we're beginning to see. That rights-based route does not lead to a civilisation of love.

This tradition is realistic about human beings' flaws - that we are fallen - our tendency is always to screw up - but at the same time subsidiarity requires that people and families should be trusted to take responsibility. Let's not forget TS Eliot's warning of creating *"systems so perfect that no one needs to be good."* Catholic Social Thought is always about balance - balancing rights with responsibilities, and balancing the importance of trusting the people, alongside appropriate state intervention.

Place

It's important to say that subsidiarity draws us to the significance that this body of thinking places on particularity and place^{xiv} - as opposed to universalism and the virtual. There is a profound ethical reason for this: through place there is real physical accountability.

In upholding subsidiarity we are allowing God's grace to flow through that person's life in grounded reality. People live in places. We are not virtual. We are physical, embodied beings, while also having a transcendent dimension. This is important in an era where we are being groomed to accept a virtual, digital future driven by powerful commercial interests.

Catholic Social Thought incorporates a theology of place - it is not abstract: it focuses on real people in real places and on practical solutions to human problems.

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 get harder. For many people that's going to be the case. While there are many new opportunities, we may now have to adopt an attitude of "tragic realism"^{xv}.

The global imperative to act on climate is clear, but our theology of place shows us that it must be balanced by agency and solidarity. So to uphold the dignity of the human person, local agency should not be subordinated to legalistic or authoritarian forms that float above the democratic level. For example, an environmental activism that fails to engage with local interests, jobs and livelihoods, and the democratic agency of the communities affected, will be divisive and will fail to gain majority support in an election: there will be great resistance to it.

So this tension between the grounded and the metaphysical points to an "integral ecology"^{xvi} that balances the interests of the natural world with peoples' livelihoods. So climate change measures therefore need to be balanced with the concerns of people, place and work as well as nature. This requires a serious green industrial strategy. It's not going to happen by itself. This is something that does have to happen at government level. In the absence of such a strategy, we risk colluding again with the politics of abandonment, division and transaction, perpetuating the dysfunctionality.

The Church in the New Era

So what is this era we are in? As Pope Francis said in 2015^{xvii}, this is not an era of change but a change of era. So how should we conceptualise the calling of the People of God at this time?

Many of the institutional churches in the West are seeing a steep trajectory of decline. Yet those who do belong tend to have a serious commitment, no longer out of duty but out of sincere conviction.

With increasingly the dominant hyper-liberal culture, churches in the West are increasingly marginalised, relegated to the private domain. But it may well be that in embracing liberal norms, some churches have become estranged from most ordinary people: there is clear evidence that the majority of the population tends to be traditional, valuing family, place and work.^{xviii} The poor are supposed to be at the heart of the Church, but the Church in many cases has become estranged from the poor.

But despite all this, the Church has a vital and legitimate civic vocation: to be the embodiment of love in a desecrated world. This needs to have a liturgical, sacramental, social and civic expression. The survival - and indeed the revival - of the Church depends on local relationships and a recognition of the importance of place.

So what is God doing in this reshaping of the Church? I'm not among those who are panicking about decline. I work across the churches, I listen across all traditions, and I think God is doing something profound.^{xix} There is death but there is also new life. I think this newfound vulnerability is causing the Church to reassess its posture.

Catholic Social Thought points us to the imperative of being relational. To become a relational Church which builds genuine relationships of loving friendship. Not just being a service provider, not just delivering food parcels, but building real, reciprocal relationships, not outsourcing to a charity, but actually doing it personally. Becoming a Church prepared to act in solidarity when things get hard. More like the early Church, where Jesus, the casual labourer in the political economy of Galilee, modelled a covenantal way of living where he lived in relationship with fellow peasants but also with tax collectors, scribes and others across class and background.^{xx}

I met a woman recently who said she'd been in terrible debt for two years. She had been to mass every week but hadn't told a soul. Now why didn't that parish have a culture where she could be real and supported? Something has happened to our Church, and it needs to become relational.

Covenant

So there are many layers to this and we're beginning to see how the tradition bridges our faith and the reality of our everyday lives. But sometimes we in the Church forget who we are - we forget the transcendent nature of our identity. We end up operating from within an earthly paradigm, using managerial, technocratic approaches - rolling out the latest programme. We might call this a "contract" approach.

We need to listen to what Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" (John 3:12)

If we ask Him into our lives, then through the indwelling of the Spirit, we will begin to discern between the realms of heaven and earth. We need to get things the right way up.

The world needs the Church to resist the dehumanising powers and to join with God^{xxi} in building the Kingdom in the places where we live. Place is important because this is where people are. The paradox is that we encounter the heavenly realm in the neighbourhood, because God works through people.

There is a passage in Isaiah which reflects this vision of rebuilding so well:

"Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in." (Isaiah 58:12)

That's a very specific vision. Quite different from "contract", "covenant" in scripture, has an expansive meaning which can have a transformational effect on our relationships, our churches and

our civic communities. Covenant is about God's unconditional promise to us in Christ. It is lasting and durable. This is where the Church needs to be thinking. In practice, it speaks to the ties that bind us together in ways that lead to the remaking of social life. It helps us re-weave the bonds of trust between generations and disparate interests.

So we need to make this shift in our posture from contract to covenant. That sense of durable, lasting promise. Unlike everybody else in the world, unlike what comes and goes with the vicissitudes of funding and decisions by local government or whatever, the Church needs to stay.

"I will be with you always." (Matthew 28:20)

Catholic Social Thought can help us translate these ideas into practice, through local forms of agency, in the economy, in business practices, in the workplace. When we make a covenantal commitment to each other, to our neighbours, we agree to an accountability earthed in the institutions and the places where we live. We offer a resistance to the dominance of technocracy and the threat of a digital future.

We are called to be involved in upholding the human space, generating relational power. To do that, as the latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*^{xxii} says, we are to build local relationships of loving friendship. Pope Francis places a lot of emphasis on this.

In other words, we, the Church, are called to a countercultural insurgency against individualism. That sounds like a political campaign. But it isn't. It is gentle. It's about tenderness. It's about spending time with each other. Restoring trust, building a common good between communities who've been divided. Building common good is the antidote to individualism.

Catholic Social Thought and Our Calling

So let's just think about our calling. This is a sophisticated body of thinking but I'm sure you can see that it is not to be deployed just as an intellectual framework.

From a Christian point of view, we know that civic renewal is not sustainable without spiritual renewal. And - spiritual renewal is not possible without a theology of the Holy Spirit that is grounded in place and shaped around the truth of what it means to be a human person. A true anthropology.

And regarding its conception of evangelisation^{xxiii}, Catholic Social Thought is holistic - Christian witness integrated into the way we actually live, it's not just proselytising, it's not just evangelising. Its conception is broad, it's about the choices we make in the real world: how we live.

There's an invitation to live in relationship with God and His created world. It shows us how and why the integrity of the human person must be upheld: and in all my life I've never come to a moment like this where I think that is really under threat. I don't need to rehearse that with you, you're aware of what's going on in the world. The integrity of the human person is under threat and it's our job to reassert what it means to be human. If we neglect this, then God can't work in the world, because He works through us. We want to live in Christ, as Jesus said we would be in John 14:21:

"I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you".

So this upholding of what it means to be human in the transcendent sense is fundamental.

And posture is important. It's about being an outward-facing church, not turning in on ourselves. Yes, having a discipleship formation that keeps us strong together, but at the same time being outward-facing, discerning where the Spirit is calling. That is because God is already at work, whether or not we are joining in, He's doing something and we can only tune in if we listen. So we don't steam ahead with our own programmes or great ideas. First we adopt a posture of listening, of attentiveness.

So we might pray "Lord, what do you want of me here?" or "Lord, show me who you want me to work with?" That's the kind of posture.

Together for the Common Good

So just a few words about how *Together for the Common Good* came about.

After drifting away from the Anglican Church, I converted to Catholicism in my mid-twenties. I then lived a quiet life, raised my children, worked as a graphic designer, nothing very interesting in terms of a career. Then in my late forties in 2011, I felt a nudging of the Spirit.

I followed a trail and I was led into relationship with others who joined me. I could see something vaguely. It felt like looking through a glass that was blurred. I felt the Holy Spirit was calling me to look at the partnership^{xxiv} between my father and Archbishop Worlock - what were the complementary gifts that made the church resonant in Liverpool at that time. We did some research and found that those complementary gifts were Catholic Social Thought and the outward-facing church. When they came together, they combined into a Church that was resonant with the people and which helped the city withstand some difficult years.

That is how I discovered this extraordinary body of thinking. Once I started reading it, I realised how important it was but was astonished how little it was known, even among Catholics. Over a couple of years *Together for the Common Good*^{xxv} was established. Since then many thousands of people have been involved. We registered as a charity in 2017.

We are dedicated to spiritual and civic renewal. We are a small, independent charity. We have acquired a reputation for promoting Catholic Social Thought in the language of the common good, across the churches and beyond. We want to make the tradition more widely known and to inspire and inform through resources and public conversations. We are dedicated to bringing this gospel way of thinking into the bloodstream of the churches so that more and more people take responsibility for the common good.

Jenny Sinclair

Founder Director, Together for the Common Good

For more information, please visit www.togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/

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- ⁱ <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/stories/a-calling-to-build-the-common-good>
- ⁱⁱ [Love and Responsibility, John Paul II](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html
- ^{iv} <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/03/31/world/vatican-s-doctrine-overview-pope-offers-gospel-life-vs-culture-death.html>
- ^v <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/leading-thinkers/the-economics-of-the-common-good>
- ^{vi} <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/about/common-good-thinking> ["Explore the source material"]
- ^{vii} <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/leading-thinkers/the-dignity-of-labour>
- ^{viii} <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/stories/rebuilding-the-broken-body>
- ^{ix} <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/about/common-good-thinking>
- ^x https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html
- ^{xi} <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/3-Letters-to-the-Churches-2022.pdf>
- ^{xii} https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html [para 14]
- ^{xiii} <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/leading-thinkers/the-assault-on-humanity>
- ^{xiv} <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/leading-thinkers/the-politics-of-grace-and-place>
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- ^{xviii} <https://www.britainschoice.uk/segments/>
- ^{xix} <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/leading-thinkers/a-new-formation-for-a-new-era>
- ^{xx} [The Radical Jesus, The Bible and the Great Transformation, Doug E Oakman](#)
- ^{xxi} [Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time, Alan J Roxburgh](#)
- ^{xxii} https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html
- ^{xxiii} https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html
- ^{xxiv} <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/about/our-history>
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