

Staying Human

AI, the Future of Work and Christian Discernment

Report of events 20-21 May, 2026



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Introduction

Together for the Common Good is a UK charity dedicated to civic and spiritual renewal. We help Christians of all traditions read the signs of the times and fulfil their vocation for the common good. We work with leaders, churches, schools, and charities. We draw on Catholic Social Teaching, a tradition rooted in the Gospel intended as a gift to all people of good will.

A key strand of this work is convening events that examine the defining issues of our time. These gatherings are intended to prompt new thinking within a moral and theological frame and centre around a guest speaker. The format is hybrid, enabling the public to engage online while an invited audience attends in person - a broad mix of mostly Christian leaders convened across traditions and sectors including churches, charities, education, media, academia, politics and policy. Our purpose is to equip leaders with the judgement, language, and relationships needed to respond well.

The Staying Human series

Our current series, *Staying Human*, confronts the challenges of the new era and explores how Catholic Social Teaching can resource us in this moment of profound change.

The stakes are high. The UK is in the midst of a deep crisis marked by collapsing trust, anger, fragmentation, and a weakening social fabric. The false anthropology that underpinned the era now unravelling has failed in economic, social, moral, and spiritual terms. Yet, while we recognise the realities before us, we sense God drawing us into a story of renewal and a deeper appreciation of what it means to be human.

We draw inspiration from the late Frank Field, who had the courage to face the truth and talk about the difficult things. We need to do that now.

This series began with **Luke Bretherton** helping us think about human agency and the spirit of the commons. **Maurice Glasman** and **Jon Cruddas** then addressed how statecraft and political economy need to change. **Susannah Black Roberts** explored what it means to be a person in the age of AI, and **Dan Hitchens** examined the value of human life in the context of assisted suicide.

We now turn to artificial intelligence and its impact on work, judgement, and human purpose. On the brink of a new industrial revolution, a Gospel-rooted vision is essential if we are to uphold agency, conscience, and mutuality — and to mitigate the potential for social unrest. AI cannot be treated as a specialist issue that is left to experts. Churches and Christian leaders have a vital role to play. To help us navigate this area, **Matthew Sanders** kindly agreed to open up the conversation for us with a lecture addressing **AI, the Future of Work and Christian Discernment**.

This report

While we do not always produce reports after events - this is written at the request of some who could not attend. It shares the substance of four elements held over two days involving Matthew Sanders: on 20 May 2026, a lecture given before an invited audience of seventy in London, followed by a Q & A, then a chaired roundtable discussion over dinner with thirty leaders including several AI specialists; and the following day, 21 May 2026, an informal conversation with a small group of parliamentarians, kindly hosted by Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach.

Please note: the intention of this report is simply to represent what happened rather than to comment or provide a broader context.

Executive Summary

We stand at the threshold of a disruption that is as much anthropological as it is economic. The pace of AI adoption and capability growth is unprecedented, and the likely consequences reach far beyond productivity and labour markets. This transition will test judgement, solidarity, and the human search for meaning as much as it will test institutions and policy.

Key findings at a glance

Key statistics: generative AI reached 53% per cent population adoption in three years. AI agents improved from roughly 12% to about 66% task success in a year; frontier task time horizons have been doubling roughly every seven months; and the gap between expert and public expectations remains stark at 73% versus 23%. The UK is especially exposed thanks to a services-heavy, information-processing economy and the weakening of manufacturing.

Challenges for the Church

The greatest danger is a crisis of meaning as the historic link between human work and survival frays for millions. The “subjective dimension” of work cannot be automated. Local churches could become vital sites where the four marks of what must remain human are cultivated: judgement under moral weight, presence with suffering, formation of conscience and character, and the givenness of community. Formation programmes, seminaries, catechesis, mentoring, and lay leadership pipelines need urgent reorientation, with collaboration across denominations and a stronger role for the laity.

Challenges for Politics and Public Life

Policymakers face urgent questions of redistribution, taxation of frontier companies, housing, welfare, agency, democratic oversight, energy infrastructure, and the prevention of two-tier systems in care and human augmentation. The Church can play a vital role by convening informed civil discourse at parish level and forming citizens capable of shaping the transition with wisdom and solidarity.

The lecture and subsequent discussions combined unflinching realism about the rough transition ahead with constructive hope grounded in the Gospel. The challenge of AI sharpens the mission of churches and reveals the deeper purpose of Christian discipleship: to build communities of belonging, relationship, and meaning when economic necessity no longer organises daily life.

Acknowledgements

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Summary of the Lecture

*Matthew Sanders delivered the lecture **AI, the Future of Work and Christian Discernment** on 20 May 2026 as part of **Together for the Common Good's Staying Human** series. Sanders, founder and CEO of Longbeard and creator of Magisterium AI, Vulgate AI, and Ephrem AI, addressed an ecumenical audience drawn from the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Evangelical, and other Christian traditions, and from Judaism, the tech industry, media, law, medicine, and charities.*



Sanders invited the audience to sit with two fundamental questions about work: What does work do to human beings? And what do human beings receive from work? He noted that we were only five days past the 135th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII's landmark 1891 encyclical that gave the modern Church her language for labour and dignity. He reminded the audience that this document was influenced by **Cardinal Manning's** intervention in the Great Dock Strike of 1889 in East London — a powerful symbol of continuity between past technological and social upheaval and our own.

The speed of disruption

Drawing on his front-line experience building faithful Catholic AI systems, Sanders presented a sobering array of statistics that made clear the speed and scale of change. The Stanford 2026 AI Index Report shows generative AI reaching 53% population adoption in just three years. He highlighted a particularly significant finding: productivity gains were “weaker or negative in tasks requiring judgement.” A striking 73% of AI experts expect a positive societal impact, compared with only 23% of the public — a 50-point gap that Sanders described as “a political and pastoral emergency waiting to happen.”

He outlined the likely timeline in three waves. White-collar work is already being affected, with a predicted 20% fall in software developer jobs (aged 22–25) in the US and similar trends in the UK. Mustafa Suleyman, Microsoft AI CEO, has predicted that most white-collar work will be automated within twelve to eighteen months. With AGI, one person equipped with AI tools could do the work of 100–200. Sam Altman has spoken of Artificial Superintelligence possibly arriving within two years, while Dario Amodei, CEO of Anthropic, described AI not as replacing individual jobs but as becoming “a general labour substitute for humans.” Andrew Bailey, Governor of the Bank of England, has warned that the displacement could rival the Industrial Revolution.

The UK is structurally exposed

The UK is structurally more exposed than many realise because of its services-heavy, information-processing economy — the legacy of forty years of globalisation and deindustrialisation — unlike manufacturing-based countries such as Germany. London and the South East are particularly vulnerable.

A crisis of meaning

The greatest danger, Sanders argued, is not simply economic but a profound **crisis of meaning**. For the first time in human history, the link between work and survival that has organised civilisation may be severed for many. Sanders turned to Pope St John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* (1981) as a remarkably precise diagnostic tool for this challenge. The encyclical distinguishes between the **objective dimension** of work (what is produced) and the **subjective dimension** (what the work does to the worker). As John Paul II teaches, the dignity of work is found primarily in the subjective dimension — and it is this dimension that should not be automated.

What must remain human

Sanders called for every formation programme, seminary curriculum, and lay leadership pipeline to be reoriented around these four marks and to be grounded in Christian anthropology.

Sanders proposed **four marks of what must remain human**:

Judgement under moral weight

Decisions in which human life, dignity, or future is genuinely at stake.

Presence with the suffering

The irreplaceable reality of being with another person in their need.

Formation of conscience and character

The slow relational work of catechesis, mentorship, and moral formation.

The givenness of community

Friendships and local relationships received rather than optimized.

How the Church can respond

Sanders concluded that the Church offers what no productivity strategy or government programme can provide: structure, community, vocation and shared purpose. He urged church leaders to begin preparing people now — especially to preach about the vocation of work, and to develop the parish as the most important anchor for meaning, neighbours and community life. He called on academics and thinkers to develop deeper vision and language for the coming reality, and on every Christian to find the young person in their life and help them understand that their dignity does not depend on economic output.

Resources

These companion resources make it easy to revisit the lecture and share it more widely with colleagues, church leaders, and discussion groups.



[Watch the lecture and Q&A](#)



[Read the lecture text](#)

Q&A

Social and solidarity crisis

A major theme was the **social and solidarity crisis** already visible in Britain. Questions drew parallels between the coming AI transition and the existing long-term effects of deindustrialisation, where generations in post-industrial communities have experienced the severing of work from survival, leading to dependency, disorientation, and anger. Contributors asked how the Church and government could avoid repeating past failures in welfare and charity, and instead foster genuine solidarity in a future where economic necessity no longer structures daily life.

Formation and the moral use of power

Another cluster of questions focused on **formation and the moral use of power**. Questions asked what kind of formation — personal, cultural, and civilisational — is needed so that both elites and ordinary people can wield these powerful tools wisely. There was particular interest in the forthcoming papal encyclical and hope that it would articulate a clear vision of human flourishing to guide technological development, redirecting resources away from unchecked AGI pursuits toward tools that genuinely serve the human person.

Dignity, inequality, and human care

Questions around **dignity, inequality and human care** probed the risk of a two-tier future. If people are willing to pay more for human attention and presence, will the wealthy receive relational care while others are served by machines? Similar concerns arose about robots caring for the elderly (with Japan cited as a cautionary example) and whether societies formed by individualism would default to convenient but non-relational options. Sanders acknowledged these as serious challenges, stressing the need for deep formation and discipline to choose the “messy” reality of human relationship over easier technological substitutes.

Governance and economic structures

On **governance, regulation and economic structures**, questions asked about UBI versus legislative limits on AI deployment in the jobs market, who would fund redistribution given massive productivity gains, and the realism of taxing frontier companies. Questions also addressed international dynamics, including China-US discussions on guardrails, the dangers of concentration of power, and whether the technology had outgrown effective regulation. Responses emphasised the competitive logic of capitalism as a driver, the likely need for negotiation between governments and leading AI firms, and the Church’s role in fostering informed civil discourse.

Anthropology and long-term meaning

Finally, questions turned to **anthropology, consciousness and long-term meaning**. Questions explored how moral judgment could be embedded in systems, the Church’s response to transhumanist ambitions, the possibility of human-android relationships, and whether AI could ever possess genuine consciousness or interiority. There was concern about the formation of children, critical thinking, appreciation of beauty, and the risk that abundant leisure without purpose would lead to deeper emptiness. Sanders consistently returned to the four marks as a discernment framework and to the parish-scale community as the essential context for formation and resistance.

Roundtable Discussion

Charity, civil society, and community

A central cluster of questions concerned the **future role of charity, civil society, and community** in a post-AGI world. Participants explored what mission charities and churches would have when many people lack meaningful work, and how society could avoid a future in which time becomes more abundant than money yet meaning is scarce. There was strong concern that UBI, while potentially necessary, would prove disastrous without deep formation and could ultimately “wreck civilisation” by failing to address the subjective and relational dimensions of human life.

Power, governance, and concentrated authority

Another major theme was **power, governance, and the risk of concentrated authority**. Questions probed the influence of oligarchs and leading AI labs, the realism of effective regulation given the technology’s scale, and the merits of sovereign AI models grounded in subsidiarity. Participants explored acceptable levels of state intervention and expressed deep suspicion of certain corporate cultures and motivations, including resistance to open source and the narrative of space colonisation. The discussion weighed whether dominance by a small number of actors was inevitable and what forms of resistance were both possible and necessary.

Formation, vocation, and civil discourse

Contributors examined the **Church’s role in formation, vocation, and civil discourse**. There were thoughtful questions on how power could be devolved to local communities, how the Church could form people for genuine human flourishing rather than mere technical literacy, and how formation programmes and seminary curricula should be reoriented around the four marks proposed in the lecture. Leaders asked how the Church could better measure and strengthen its own spiritual health and motivate greater lay involvement. The parish emerged as the essential scale for convening informed civil discourse that could then shape political pressure and hold elites accountable.

Hope, resistance, and civil society

Questions around **hope, resistance, and civil society** revealed both sober historical realism and quiet determination. Some drew pessimistic parallels with the Industrial Revolution and expressed concern about tax evasion, weak institutions, and the likelihood of generous redistribution. Others asked what gives hope and how the Church could help rebuild civilisation through practical work, local economies, and renewed emphasis on manual and relational labour. The conversation affirmed that the technology reveals institutional weaknesses but also calls forth a robust civil society response.

Anthropological and long-term questions

The discussion engaged deeply with **anthropological and long-term questions**. Attention was given to transhumanist ambitions, human-android relationships and anticipated future moments of cultural clash in which the Church would need to articulate a clear Christian anthropology with confidence and charity. Participants considered the formation of children, critical thinking, the appreciation of beauty, and the risk that leisure without purpose would deepen emptiness. Energy scarcity, competition for resources between AI infrastructure and human communities, and the potential for data centres to exploit poorer regions were also examined.

Informal Parliamentary Discussion

Housing, construction, and practical trades

The discussion explored **the structure of the UK economy and the future of practical trades**. There was concern that the UK's services-heavy economy leaves it particularly exposed compared with manufacturing-based nations. There was interest that manual trades might prove more resistant to full automation than information-processing roles. Participants highlighted the acute shortage of homes and high levels of personal debt. They explored whether AI-assisted design tools and 3D printing could support a self-build movement enabling families to construct their own homes.

Social disorientation and local renewal

Contributors drew clear connections between the coming AI transition and **existing patterns of social disorientation** caused by deindustrialisation and globalisation. They noted widespread loss of meaning, identity struggles, mental health challenges, and fragmented social life. Questions focused on how churches and local institutions could serve as focal points for renewal — clustering families, rebuilding high-trust community, and developing co-ownership models and local economies to fill the vacuum left by declining traditional work.

Economic redistribution and governance

On **economic redistribution and governance**, the discussion was sharp. Participants asked what guarantees exist that the huge productivity gains and profits from AI would be widely shared, noting that markets alone would not incentivise redistribution. There was strong emphasis on the necessary role of democracy, taxation of frontier AI companies, and negotiation between national governments and global technology firms to ensure fair outcomes during the transition.

Care and human relationships

Questions around **care and human relationships** raised the risk of emerging two-tier systems, in which some receive relational human care while others are served primarily by robots. Japan's experience with advanced robotics, loneliness, pornography addiction, and state-supported fertility programmes was cited as a cautionary example of technology's unintended social consequences.

Subsidiarity and citizen empowerment

The principle of **subsidiarity and citizen empowerment** featured prominently. There was concern that critical decisions were being made by distant elites, further dispossessing ordinary people. At the same time, participants recognised AI's potential to strengthen democratic participation, for example by enabling rapid citizen scrutiny of complex legislation. The forthcoming papal encyclical was welcomed as a timely contribution toward a needed civilisational vision.

Finally, the group explored **anthropology, consciousness, and long-term formation**, including the implications of human-android relationships and how the Church should respond when people seek religious blessings for such arrangements. There was concern that current formation in schools, as well as in churches and families - is inadequate for the new era. There was an emphasis on the need to teach Christian anthropology, and the meaning of the dignity of the person made in the image of God, in terms that are easily understood.

Calls to Action

Together for the Common Good is deeply grateful to Matthew Sanders for his candid, insightful, and theologically grounded contribution, prompting a serious response to this new era and informed action. We recommend [watching or reading](#) his lecture alongside the [earlier lectures](#) in the series.

The advance of AI is not only a technological or economic disruption. It is a moment that forces a clearer reckoning with what it means to be human. Every response of the Church — in formation, mission, public witness, and community life — must be grounded firmly in Christian anthropology.

The local church and parish stand at the centre of any serious response. It is here that the four marks of what must remain human (see page 5) can be embodied, taught, and sustained. It is here that conscience, character, and genuine community are formed at the scale where people are known. The challenge is great, but its very gravity may clarify the Church's mission and sharpen its resolve.

National clergy and Church institutions

Review and reorient formation programmes, seminaries, catechesis, and lay leadership pipelines in light of the four marks. Collaborate across national and regional bodies to develop shared resources, policy engagement, accountability tools, and formation that prepares the whole Church to accompany communities in the rough transition ahead.

Local church leaders and congregations

Become deliberate centres of embodied life and high-trust community. Invest in intentional formation, mentoring, practical service, apprenticeships in virtue, local economies, and clustering families around the parish. Create the fabric of love that counters isolation and despair, and model the givenness of community.

Christian thinkers, writers, and academics

Develop deeper language, theological vision, cultural narratives, and accessible, practical resources for the post-work horizon. Shape public discourse, education, and policy so that human flourishing — not mere productivity or technological augmentation — becomes the civilisational goal.

Every Christian

Take the situation of the next generation seriously. Invest time in mentoring, neighbourly presence, local service, and the discerning use of AI. Choose the relational over the convenient. Support one another across traditions. Go where the suffering is.

Parliamentarians and policymakers

Strengthen democracy and subsidiarity so that citizens, not only elites, shape the transition. Address housing, fair redistribution, taxation of frontier companies, energy infrastructure, and care systems with wisdom and foresight. Work with the Church and civil society to build informed public discourse and ensure no one is rendered irrelevant.

The transition ahead will be rough. The scale and speed of change, combined with fragile social cohesion, low institutional trust, and weakened formation pathways, present a serious test for the Church and for society. The Christian tradition has resources older and deeper than this technology, but they will only prove adequate if they are deployed with clarity, courage, and urgency.

Magnifica Humanitas

Our events of 20-21 May were timed close to the 135th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (15 May) and in anticipation of *Magnifica Humanitas* which was published on 25 May 2026 by Pope Leo XIV. It is a landmark intervention (42,000 words), deeply grounded in the Gospel, and we highly recommend it.

Although it addresses artificial intelligence, the encyclical's core focus is anthropology – what it means to be human. Its full title is *Magnificent Humanity: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*, and it is directly relevant to the themes explored in this report:

- It frames this moment as a decisive civilisational choice: to build a new **Tower of Babel** through technocratic domination, or **a holy city** in which God and humanity dwell together.
- This uncompromising document firmly **rejects the technocratic paradigm** and transhumanist narratives that treat human limitation as a flaw to be engineered away. It insists that the human person flourishes through limitation, not in spite of it, and **calls for AI to be “disarmed”** — freed from logics of domination, exclusion, and death.
- Yet it says, **“disarming does not mean renouncing technology, but preventing it from dominating humanity.”** The encyclical confronts the concrete impacts of AI on truth, work, freedom, democracy, and warfare, demanding that technology serve the dignity of the person rather than invert that order.
- By using the book of **Nehemiah** as a central metaphor for shared responsibility and decentralised collaboration—the antidote to Babel—Pope Leo calls on everyone to **play their part in the rebuilding** and enter 'the construction sites of history' to protect human dignity.
- “...I ask everyone to abandon the construction of yet another Tower of Babel and to **join forces in building up the common good**, so that humanity will never lose its beauty...”

Share, discuss, act

Christians are called to respond with faithful, stubborn, and organised presence in this new era. Local churches must recover their proper role. And together, for the common good, the Church and all people of good will must help shape a civilisation that honours the truth about the human person.

Feel free to share these resources and prompt conversations with friends, family, and colleagues. And if you value what we are doing, please consider supporting this work. Thank you!

Together for the Common Good

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Send comments

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