DO JUSTICE

A Vision for Spiritual and Civic Renewal in England and Wales

"…and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Micah 6:8

caritas
social action network

Caritas Social Action Network
an agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

“We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know Him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship.”

Dorothy Day (67)

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“If the conditions are zero for anyone, they are zero for the true common good of all.”

Anna Rowlands (69)

FOREWORD

"For the love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5: 14). With these words St Paul summed up the motivation of the first Christians. The love of the risen Christ was what drove them to be ambassadors of reconciliation, to build a world of peace and justice.

Caritas Social Action Network, the agency of the bishops' conference dedicated to tackling poverty and injustice in England and Wales, is likewise inspired by the love of God for all people. We are a member of Caritas Internationalis, the Church's world-wide expression of charity in over 160 countries, bringing humanitarian relief, restoring dignity to people in distress, and advocating for justice.

A key part of our role is to convene the 53 charities - diocesan Caritas agencies and independent charities - that are members of CSAN, in order to support, encourage and resource their frontline work of charity and justice.

We hope that this publication, *Do Justice: a Vision for Spiritual and Civic Renewal in England and Wales*, will prove to be a resource which inspires Catholic communities to action. In the months and years ahead, we would like to provide further resources depending on what would be most helpful.

We know that the needs in our communities are urgent. Many people are having to make the choice that no one should have to make: between heating their homes or feeding their families. As Sister Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, said: "The poor need help today, not next week."

I commend *Do Justice* to you and I encourage you to take up the invitation in this publication to respond to the questions of the CSAN team, so we can proclaim good news, discern what needs to be challenged and changed, and together work on resources to help us build up the Kingdom of God.

+ Malcolm McMahon OP

Most Rev Malcolm McMahon
Archbishop of Liverpool, Chair of CSAN

OUR VISION

Our vision for the nations of England and Wales, centred on Christ and Catholic Social Teaching, is of a civilisation of love, solidarity and justice, where the dignity of every person is respected and upheld; where everyone can flourish and live in peace and freedom, where there is no exclusion, discrimination or dehumanising poverty.

Our mission as the agency of the Bishops' Conference dedicated to tackling poverty and injustice in England and Wales is to animate and support the work and formation of our members - the Caritas agencies in our dioceses and independent charities - and to raise a prophetic voice in the public arena against injustice.

Our invitation to the Catholic communities of England and Wales is to fulfil ever more deeply our baptismal vocation to be "the witnesses and agents of peace and justice" (1. Pope John Paul II, 1987), to show a preferential love for those who live in various forms of poverty, and to "identify and resist structures of injustice" (2. Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, 1996) in our society.

> *"It is not enough merely to formulate a social doctrine. It must be translated into reality. And this is particularly true of the Church's social doctrine, the light of which is Truth, Justice its objective, and Love its driving force."*
>
> Pope John XXIII (63)

2 THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

"The joys and hopes and the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially those who are poor and afflicted, are also the joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties of the disciples of Christ, and there is nothing truly human which does not affect them" (3. Gaudium et Spes, 1965)

With these words, the Catholic Church confirmed its solidarity with the human family, especially people who experience various forms of poverty and disadvantage. This is our starting point, our orientation towards the world. We reach out in love, not turn inwards in self-defence. The teaching of the Church at Vatican II, inspired by a return to the source of the Gospel, is that we should engage with all our brothers and sisters in the reality of their lives, especially with individuals and families who are struggling.

The mission of the Church, as explained in the same document of Vatican II, is to continue the work of Christ, "who came into the world to give witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served" (4. Gaudium et Spes, 1965). The Church works for "the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity" (5. Pope Benedict XVI, 2009), with a preferential option for those who are poor and vulnerable. The Church, and all the organisations which take their identity from the Church, are called to be missionaries, to serve humanity, to go out into the world, "in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be a sign of unity…to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation" (6. Pope Francis, 2020).

In order to fulfil this mission of service, the Church "has the duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (7. Gaudium et Spes, 1965) so that we can bring to the great issues of the day, in a language which people can understand, the wisdom and stimulation of the Gospel. Reading the signs of the times, however, does not mean that we scan the landscape for all that is wrong with the world. We're not blind to that, but it's not the first thing we look for. The teaching of Vatican II reminds us that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world, in all people of goodwill. Our first task, therefore, in reading the signs of the times, is to discern where God is at work, looking for "the movements of the spirit of good" (8. Pope Francis, 2013).

On a local and domestic level, this means that when caring, healthy relationships are forming or re-forming, especially across societal divides, when people are mobilising in their local community to support people who are hungry, when the stranger is welcomed and integrated, when injustice and discrimination is challenged, there is movement of the Spirit.

On a national or global level, when people are organising to challenge racism or misogyny, when people are standing up for freedom and democracy in the face of violence and oppression, when local groups are challenging the exploitative practices of corporations, there may also be a movement of the Spirit. If the fruits of this work are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness…" (Galatians 5:22) - not rancour and division - then it is more likely to be the work of the Spirit. As Pope Francis reminds us, "Whenever in the world you have a response that is immediate, close, warm and concerned…that's where God's Spirit is present" (9. Pope Francis, 2020)

Catholic organisations and groups – parishes, schools, chaplaincies, charities – are invited to read the signs of the times for evidence of God's activity and "to cooperate with this liberating work of the Spirit" (10. Pope Francis, 2013). As Pope Francis says, there is a "profound connection between evangelization and human advancement" (11. Pope Francis, 2013). Our response to the gift of God's love is to seek the good of others, to promote the dignity of all our brothers and sisters, primarily by loving each other, sharing burdens and walking alongside each other. We are called to work in good faith – without surrendering anything of our identity – with all people who are committed to defending human dignity or protecting creation. We may not agree with all of their principles or tactics, but we can find common ground and shared purpose.

> *"The Spirit shows us new things through what the Church calls the 'signs of the times'. Discerning the signs of the times allows us to make sense of change. In interpreting and praying over events or trends in the light of the Gospel, we can detect movements that reflect the values of God's Kingdom or their opposite."*
>
> (12. Pope Francis, 2020)

WHAT IS NOT OF GOD?

When the signs of the times, our reading of the trends and movements in society, are the opposite of the values of God's Kingdom of compassion and justice, then we need to identify and challenge them. Catholic parishes and schools are invited to read the signs of the times in their own communities, using the *See-Judge-Act* method. This was first enshrined in the Magisterium of the Church by Pope John XXIII in his 1961 encyclical, *Mater et Magistra* (13). The method involves firstly looking at the reality of the situation in the community as fully as possible, especially the reality for those on the margins, the most isolated, excluded or disadvantaged. What's going on? Who is struggling? Whose voices are unheard? Who benefits? Why is this happening? A community may also ask who they have become estranged from, who they do not know?

The second stage is to *discern* (the word now preferred to "judge" by many, including Pope Francis), in the light of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching, what is of God and what is not, what is humanising and what is dehumanising? It means trying to see the situation with the eyes of our compassionate God. No easy task, because we are human, but that is what we are called to do, asking for the grace to see the situation through God's eyes. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, "The Christian's programme —the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is 'a heart which sees'. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly" (14. Pope Benedict XVI, 2005). That is the third stage, acting where love is needed, thinking creatively of how to intervene and change the situation so that it is more in line with social justice, the conditions which allow the flourishing of all, with no one left behind.

On a national level, in England and Wales, the last few years have been exceptionally difficult for people who were already living in chronic poverty. The Covid-19 pandemic - which affected some groups much more than others - and the sharp increases in the cost of energy, food and other essentials in 2022, have dragged many more into precarious circumstances. One of the most authoritative reports on material poverty is published each year by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Their most recent report, *UK Poverty 2023*, paints a shocking picture of the levels of poverty in the UK.

The data reveals that "around one in five of our population (20%) were in poverty in 2020/21 – 13.4 million people. Of these, 7.9 million were working adults, 3.9 million were children and 1.7 million were pensioners" (15. See: Annex 1 of the report for definitions of poverty). More than 2 in 5 people from Black ethnic groups were in poverty, compared to 1 in 5 from white ethnic groups. This is not just the result of recent events. For a decade and a half, the report says, there has been no meaningful improvements in living standards.

Data is powerful and tells a compelling story, but so does the voice of those who have lived experience of poverty and isolation. Martin Green is a lone parent who lives in Halifax. Unable to work, he has found again and again that the benefits system – which should act as an anchor for people like Martin and his children – has instead swept them further into poverty. These are his words:

"The amount paid in benefits means you're facing impossible situations. In a good month I can get stuff for food but never anything extra. If I need a new pair of shoes, for example, I need to take money off what I have for food… I just snack; I don't eat proper meals. The children have always come first and I just eat small bits here and there.

I sometimes go all day without eating. If my lad is out with his mates, I will sometimes not eat… If I'm in the house on my own all day I'll tend not to eat until 6 or 7 o'clock, if at all, and I know that if I can keep that food in the cupboard a bit longer, that's another day of survival.

Because I am in the church circle, I have a lot of charitable friends who are helping me. I'm okay for being fed but I have no money to do anything with my sons, like go out to the cinema or football. That's what's the hardest thing for me." (16)

From a theological perspective, poverty is a scandal, not part of God's will for human flourishing. From the beginning of the 'story of stories' in the Bible, the story of God's love for humanity, God has responded to suffering with compassion. In the Law of Moses, the people were entreated to "open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land" (Deuteronomy 15: 11). The prophets challenged the exploitative economic practices of the elite and encouraged the people to act with integrity, to "do justice" (Micah 6:8), in other words, to act in ways which enjoy God's approval.

> *"Isolation and withdrawal into one's own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather, it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter. Isolation, no; closeness, yes. Culture clash, no; culture of encounter, yes."*
>
> Pope Francis (65)

In the Incarnation, the Word of God was born into poverty, in a manger, in the midst of animals. When he was presented at the temple, his parents brought two turtledoves, the offering of those who could not afford a lamb (Luke 2:24, Leviticus 5:7). He was raised in a home of ordinary workers and worked manually to

earn his bread. When he began to preach, "he assured those burdened by sorrow and crushed by poverty that God has a special place for them in his heart" (17. Pope Francis, 2013). Because God opts for the poor, the Church has "made an option for the poor" (18. Pope Francis, 2013), in whom we encounter Christ himself (Matthew 25: 40).

The Church is concerned with the development of the whole person - in their physical, spiritual, social and emotional dimensions - in other words integral human development. The drivers of poverty are not just economic, but relational and psychological: broken relationships, addiction, exclusion. This is reflected in the teaching that "Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person and all mankind" (19. Pope John Paul II, 1990). The teaching of the Church proposes that everything should be available to each person in order to live "a truly human life" (20, Gaudium et Spes, 1965). This constitutes not only the basics such as "food, clothing, shelter" but also "the rights of free choice of one's state of life and to found a family, to education, to work, to one's good name, to respect…" (21. Gaudium et Spes, 1965).

The Church sees poverty as more than just material deprivation. Pope John Paul II spoke of "many other forms of poverty" (22. Pope John Paul II, 1987) by which he meant every form of a person's impoverishment, including "the denial or the limitation of human rights - as for example the right to religious freedom, the right to share in the building of society, the freedom to organise and to form unions" (23. Pope John Paul II, 1987). The Catechism also expands the definition of poverty to include "unjust oppression…" (24) and links the "human misery" it causes to the inherited condition and need for salvation caused by original sin.

The disciples of Christ are called upon to show a *preferential love* for those oppressed by poverty and "to work for their relief, defence and liberation" (25. CCC). We are called not just to be *for* those who are oppressed, but perhaps more importantly, to be *with* them. In the context of England and Wales, this means working with all those oppressed by the poverty of material want, who do not have the essentials to live in dignity; but also with those who are isolated, trafficked or exploited, seeking asylum, discriminated against because of their race, age, sex, sexual orientation, or class, those who are denied just working conditions and a real living wage. We are called to help to liberate people from anything which binds them down and prevents them from enjoying a truly human life.

On a global level, Pope Francis has guided us in reading the signs of the times in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. He laments the loss of the vision of one human family with a common origin and a common home. This sense of solidarity – that everyone is connected, that we need each other – re-surfaced in the Covid-19 crisis, but has since faded, as 'business as usual' took over. The focus was literally on business, on the recovery of the economy rather than the community. For Pope Francis, many forms of injustice in the world are fed by "a profit-based economic model that does not hesitate to exploit, discard and even kill human beings" (26. Pope Francis, 2020).

We have been beguiled by the consumer story, which encourages individualism and self-reliance fuelled by the 'prizes' of possessions and status, while it also hardens hearts and renders us indifferent to the "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (27. Pope Francis, 2015). This story does not benefit all, only those with the wealth to enjoy it. This story undermines the sense of community and mutual obligation. At the same time, the economic model of the consumer culture drives wages down and discards people in the name of competition, profit and efficiency. The latest manifestation of this is the rapid introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) which is replacing human beings with technology and reducing human encounter and support, with a rationale that people are inefficient and unreliable.

The solution, says Pope Francis, is not to try and soften the edges of the economic system to make it a little more compassionate, but "to redesign the economy so that it can offer every person access to a dignified existence while protecting and regenerating the natural world" (28. Pope Francis, 2020). The antidote to the culture of selfishness and aggression is a renewed sense of relationship and encounter, rooted in solidarity and fraternity. Pope Francis hopes that "by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity" (29. Pope Francis, 2020).

It is important to stress here that Pope Francis is not anti-business. In *Fratelli Tutti*, he says that business activity is a noble vocation which is directed to improving our world. We are all called to develop our God-given talents, which includes finding the best means of multiplying goods and increasing wealth. The key point is that business abilities, which are a gift from God, "should always be clearly directed to the development of others and to eliminating poverty, especially through the creation of diversified work opportunities" (30. Pope Francis, 2020). He reminds us that the universal destination of goods - the right of all to the use of the goods of the earth - is a primary principle and prior to the right to private property. Catholic Social Teaching has always put people before profit, or labour before capital.

> *"Just as the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say 'thou shalt not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills."*
>
> (31. Pope Francis, 2013)

4 LET THE OPPRESSED GO FREE

Many people of goodwill are committed to ending poverty and injustice. The Church should find common cause with them where there is a broad alignment of values, while asserting a distinctively Catholic worldview. We benefit from the expert work of others who gather and analyse the data on poverty, and organise skilled campaigns inspired by the vision of a poverty-free society. These people and their organisations will have various sources of inspiration, but for the Church, "the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (32. Pope Francis, 2020).

In St Luke's Gospel, Jesus announced his mission, his manifesto as some have called it, in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. Reading from the scroll of Isaiah, he says that he has come, "to bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4: 18). The poor that Jesus refers to here are the destitute, the ones who know their need for God. Jesus goes on to declare, "let the oppressed go free" (4:18) making it clear, as we noted above, that the salvation he offers is liberation from everything that oppresses and enslaves human beings, in other words sin and its social consequences. With the intention to restore "sight to the blind" (4:18) at the centre of the rhetorical pattern, we are left with no doubt that the heart of the mission of Jesus is compassion. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus refers to the Kingdom of God. He is inaugurating a new social order, a new way of being in relationship with each other founded on love and justice.

The mission of the Church is to proclaim this good news and to work for the building up of this kingdom. This evangelisation – a fundamental aspect of the identity of the Church – has a social dimension. Pope Paul VI taught that, "between evangelisation and human advancement - development and liberation - there are in fact profound links" (33. Pope Paul VI, 1975). Pope Francis takes up the same theme when he says, "the kerygma has a clear social content: at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others. The content of the first proclamation has an immediate moral implication centred on charity" (34. Pope Francis, 2013). By the kerygma he means the essential elements of the Gospel proclamation: our creation, salvation and mission on this earth as we look forward to life with God in heaven.

The focus on the importance of life in community, as the setting in which we *find ourselves* in loving relationships with other people, stems from the fundamental teaching of the Church about the human person. We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), in other words we are made in the image of the Trinity, a divine community of love, equality, participation and mission. God is love and we are called into friendship with this loving God. Our vocation as human beings is to love, that is the highest expression of our identity. God's plan for his children was for them to live in 'right relation' with Him, with each other and with creation. Sin is a breach in this relationship, when human beings 'grasp' what they want for their own pleasure and profit, including power over other people.

In the garden-earth that we share, our common home, there is enough for us all. Everyone has a right to access the goods of the earth they need for a fully human life. This is known as **the universal destination of goods**. The highest teaching authority of the Church, the Council of all the bishops of the world in communion with the Pope at Vatican II, declared: "God has destined the earth and all it contains for the use of everyone and of all peoples, so that the good things of creation should be available equally to all, with justice as guide and charity in attendance" (35. Gaudium et Spes, 1965).

Creation is not a commodity to be exploited for profit, but a gift of our loving Creator for the sustenance and delight of his creatures. Hunger, which is driving more and more people in England and Wales to use food banks (36. Trussell Trust, 2023), is the result of the unjust distribution of food and income. Being cold because you cannot afford to heat your home is likewise the result of the unjust distribution of resources. We are destroying the earth to sustain a lifestyle in affluent sectors of society which consumes far more than is needed for a decent life, while our brothers and sisters go without essentials. In the early Church we saw a vision of the sharing and distribution of resources "to all, as any had need" (Acts 2: 45).

The consumer story is a zero-sum game. Success in this story is only possible for some, because the earth could not sustain the damage caused by everyone 'succeeding' on those terms. The consumer story reduces us to grasping individuals, not persons in community. The social fabric is damaged by "unbridled consumerism combined with inequality" (37. Pope Francis, 2013). The JRF report states that the UK has "some of the largest geographical inequalities in the Western world" (38. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023). So much of the value produced by workers flows to owners and shareholders, not the workers themselves, many of whom are on low-pay and insecure or 'zero hours' contracts. Inequality undermines the common good, excessive economic and social differences "cause scandal and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the person, as well as social and international peace" (39. Gaudium et Spes, 1965).

Consumerism is driven by competition and greed, not solidarity. The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, in their 1996 document *The Common Good*, provided a critique of the consumer story: "To promote the idea that the individual is primarily to be considered by society as a consumer – that is to say when an individual's greatest significance is as a possessor of wealth and purchaser of goods and services – is both contrary to the Gospel and to any rational idea of what a human being really is. It gravely disadvantages those who do not have wealth to spend. Unlimited free markets tend to produce what is in effect an 'option against the poor'" (40. The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, 1996).

> *"The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience."*
>
> (41. Pope Francis, 2013)

5 CONVERSION OF THE HEART

Christians are called to action to build a better world, to promote and defend the dignity of all human beings from conception to the natural end of life, to confront the "throwaway culture" (42. Pope Francis, 2020) which is a consequence of the cult of consumerism. What is discarded in this culture is not just food and waste products from production cycles, but also people, "who are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, 'not yet useful' – like the unborn, or 'no longer needed' – like the elderly" (43. Pope Francis, 2020).

Our call to defend the dignity of the person, especially people in the most vulnerable situations, and to identify and challenge the causes of injustice, has its source not in ourselves, or in our own will to bring about change, or in any ideology. For Christians, the source of our determination to renew society and build a better world comes from God's grace, which is freely available to us through faith, our conversion of heart. At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus called people to "repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15).

The Greek word for repent – *metanoeite* – carries the suggestion of changing the inner self. Pope Paul VI called this, "a total interior renewal…a radical conversion, a profound change of mind and heart" (44. Pope Paul VI, 1975). Conversion of heart is the priority, so that our "old self" (Romans 6:6), our enslavement to sin and injustice, is transformed by God's grace and we "walk in newness of life" (6:4) as ambassadors of God's kingdom. We need to 'unlearn' old ways, including many of the values of the consumer culture that have formed us. We need to courageously examine our worldview for where it differs from the Gospel.

The disciples of Christ are the "poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3), the ones who know their need of God, who are not run by ego or attachment to wealth. In the Beatitudes, "the heart of Jesus' preaching" (45. CCC), we hear more about what characterises the vocation of the Christian. Their role in the world is to be "peacemakers" (5:9) and "to hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:6). The Greek word *dikaiosune* can be translated as righteousness or justice. To modern ears, justice might be more helpful. The Jerusalem Bible opted for the phrase "for what is right". It carries the sense of judicial approval, in other words what is approved by God.

Love is the heart of the Gospel, since God is love (1 John 4: 8). The Law of the Gospel is contained in the 'new commandment' of Jesus to love one another as he has loved us (John 15: 12). This is more than love of our neighbours, or those in our 'group', but the radical love of the Gospel to love even your enemies, to 'be a neighbour' to all people who are vulnerable and wounded by the side of the road (Luke 10: 36-37). Being a loving neighbour, seeking the good of the other, includes seeking their physical, social and economic, as well as spiritual, well-being. The plan of redemption includes "the concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored" (46. Pope Paul VI, 1975).

In recent years, the teaching of the Church has expanded the definition of conversion to an *ecological conversion*. Our conversion of heart will lead not just to a determination to love God and to be a neighbour to those in poverty, but to adopt a *lifestyle*, a simple way of living, in which we tread lightly on the earth and share our goods so that fewer go without the essentials for a dignified human life. Pope Francis describes this conversion as a *reconciliation* with creation, which encompasses our relationships with God, our fellow human beings and the natural world. This conversion is not a solo project, as "the ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion" (47. Pope Francis, 2015).

Any renewal in the Church must begin with a conversion of the heart, an interior shift by which we live in the knowledge that we are children of God, not autonomous individuals charting our own course. The Church herself is in need of "continual reformation" (48. Pope Francis, 2013). In recent years, the abuse scandals have been a source of shame for the Church and damaged her credibility as a sacrament of salvation in the world. As we seek to contribute to the renewal of society, we must commit to the renewal of the Church, with a systematic preferential option for the care of the most vulnerable, with an openness to the creative work of the Spirit.

Church communities, gathered in the Holy Spirit around the Risen Lord (Luke 24: 46-49) should be places of communion, hospitality, and mission, places where relationships are formed and sustained, where no one feels excluded or belittled, where those who are struggling are accompanied; places of witness to the Gospel and care of our common home in the wider community. Church communities, in other words, should stand out as being "catalysts for the redemption and transformation of social relationships" (49. Compendium, 2004) in their place and time.

> *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect."*
>
> (Romans 12: 2)

> *"To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity"*
>
> (50, Pope Francis, 2013)

"A civilization of love is not sentimentality; it is justice and truth. A civilization of love that did not demand justice for people, would not be true civilisation, it would not define authentic relations between people. Because of this, it is only a caricature of love when we want to patch with charity what is owed in justice."

St Oscar Romero (64)

6 CALL TO ACTION

"An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it" (51. Pope Francis, 2013).

The Gospel begins with compassion but does not end there. Love insists on justice, on just relationships, which are the foundation of peace and reconciliation. Christians are called to be active in the world, to build up God's kingdom of love and justice. The Bishops of England and Wales have said that, "Evangelisation always requires the transformation of an unjust social order; and one of its primary tasks is to oppose and denounce such injustices" (52. Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, 1996). The Catholic community, in other words, should not be silent in the face of social injustice. We are called to raise a prophetic voice. Indeed, we are called to go further than pronouncements, we are called to act. Solidarity, as Pope Francis has said, means more than acts of generosity, it also means "combating the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights" (53. Pope Francis, 2020).

In discerning what to do, as we have noted already, we are guided by the See-Judge/Discern-Act methodology. Key to this is our understanding of the principles by which we view the present situation. The 'permanent principles' of Catholic Social Teaching are our guide in this respect. The foundational principle is the **dignity of the human person**, made in the image of God, with a divine origin and an eternal destiny. Dignity is not only personal but structural, in other words we look in society's structures and systems for where there is *not* dignity. Where is dignity lacking, or threatened, in places of work, in housing conditions, in our social security system, in our online culture, in our asylum system, our prison system?

We are inspired by a vision of the **common good**, which is "the whole network of social conditions which enable human individuals and groups to flourish and live a fully, genuinely human life" (54. Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, 1996). At the heart of this vision is our understanding of **solidarity**, that "we are all really responsible for all" (55. Pope John Paul II, 1987). To be made in the image of God means that we are made to flourish in community, to co-operate and look out for each other. We are moved by the sufferings of others, since their suffering is our suffering. We do not walk by on the other side of the road. Solidarity is the virtue that is determined to challenge the root causes of injustice, so that no one is left behind.

Justice is a Gospel value, as well as the corresponding moral virtue. It's something you do, as well as something you live your life by. In the classical formulation, justice "consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbour" (56. CCC). From the subjective point of view, justice is translated into behaviour that is based on the recognition of the dignity of

> *"Love is expressed first in being with before doing to someone. We have to continually renew our awareness of this because we can get caught up in a lot of the doing for. You see, if our actions do not first come from the desire to be with a person, then it really becomes just social work. When you are willing to be with a poor person you can recognise his need, and if your love is genuine, you naturally want to do what you can as an expression of your love."*
>
> Saint Teresa of Calcutta (68)

the other. From an objective point of view, it is the criteria of morality in the social sphere.

The Church calls for all forms of justice to be respected: *commutative* (exchanges between person with respect for their rights), *legal* (what the citizen owes in fairness to the community) and *distributive* (what the community owes its citizens) (57. CCC). These dimensions of justice, which stress the responsibilities as well as the rights of the person, can be brought together under the heading of **social justice**, which refers to the structural or institutional solutions which promote the common good, the flourishing of all. Social justice is the charter for social renewal, the reform of institutions and systems which promote human dignity and community.

The Catechism tells us that "it is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens and intermediate bodies" (58. CCC). This is why Catholics should be politically engaged, in other words engaged in ensuring that the political community upholds its responsibility for the common good. This

does not mean that we want to run the country, that is not part of mainstream Catholic teaching. We do, however, seek to influence and persuade those who hold power, by using a range of non-violent strategies, to make systemic changes to enhance the dignity of the human person in all settings. The state has a key role, for example, in ensuring the just distribution of goods to ensure that everyone has the essentials for a dignified life.

The state also has a role to play in supporting "intermediate bodies", which is the principle of **subsidiarity**. Decisions should be made as close as possible to the people who will be affected by them. This requires the participation of people in the life and destiny of the community, especially those most affected by poverty. Participation liberates people from the poverty of isolation and lack of agency. These intermediate bodies – whether that's a choir, a football club, or a union – are an essential part of our psychological and social well-being. Outside of the family - "the cradle of life and love" (59. Pope John Paul II, 1988) - they are the places where we learn to live well together, to get to know and support one another.

It is, however, important to note that intermediate bodies come with a health warning. When such bodies become obsessed with 'membership' and identity markers to the aggressive exclusion of others, when identity hardens into bigotry, then they are not contributing to the common good. We should also be clear that the pursuit of the common good is not something to be left to the state alone, far from it. The state has a role, so do Christians, indeed everyone in civil society has a duty to contribute as well as receive. This is where 'society' - or better still community - happens, in the space between the state and the corporate entities.

Our society is in need of renewal, the social fabric of our communities is in need of repair, and our social relations, which have become more polarised, are in need of being strengthened. We have become estranged from one another, seduced by a culture of individualism and cynicism, which leads to isolation and division. We have allowed poverty - in all its forms - to get a grip on our country once again, depriving people of agency and any sense of hope for the future. Christians are called to projects of social justice which are *with* and *of* those who experience poverty, not *for* them. The role of those who have choices and resources in life is to enable those who do not to find agency, to become "artisans of their destiny" (60. Pope Paul VI, 1967). The voice of the lived experience of poverty and exclusion must be heard and attended to in the work of justice.

> *"This social order requires constant improvement. It must be founded on truth, built on justice and animated by love; in freedom it should grow every day toward a more humane balance. An improvement in attitudes and abundant changes in society will have to take place if these objectives are to be gained"*
>
> (61. Gaudium et Spes, 1965)

"To each, therefore, must be given his own share of goods, and the distribution of created goods, which, as every discerning person knows, is labouring today under the gravest evils due to the huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered propertyless, must be effectively called back to and brought into conformity with the norms of the common good, that is, social justice."

Pope Pius XI (62)

7 NEXT STEPS

We invite the Catholic community – in our parishes, schools, chaplaincies, charities, religious orders and other organisations – to contribute to our programme for spiritual and civic renewal in England and Wales. Participating groups in parishes are invited to follow the three-session programme **Do Justice:** *for parishes* which you'll find on our website: www.dojustice.co.uk. Participating groups in schools or multi academy trusts are invited to follow the programme **Do Justice:** *for schools*, also available on our website. For groups not involved in these programmes, you could consider the following questions:

1. ***Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in people in your community for the common good – any examples and case studies?***
2. ***Where do you most see the need for spiritual and civic renewal, in your community and on a national level?***
3. ***What might you do with the capacity you have to contribute to renewal, to bring about a more just community?***
4. ***What further resources or links to networks would help you in the ongoing work of renewal?***

Please send your responses to dojustice@csan.org.uk when you are ready.

This is an ongoing project which is intended to build and develop in the coming months and years. Any general or local elections which take place will no doubt heighten the level of public discourse. The purpose of this 'core text' is to remind the Catholic community of the principles we bring to any discussion in the public square. We have our own story of what it means to be human and live a good life.

In the coming months, we will promote our story in different ways. We will share the 'good news' from our communities of where the Holy Spirit is at work for the common good. We will help to identify and challenge the barriers to the common good, working with others who are committed to building a better world. We will identify specific advocacy priorities, and changes to policy and procedure which could make the biggest difference to those who experience poverty. We will develop resources which our parishes and schools tell us would be most helpful for them.

In the meantime, everyone can respond to the call of the Holy Spirit by praying and reflecting on sacred Scripture, by observing their local community through the lens of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching, by learning more about what is going on, by speaking up against injustice, campaigning for improvements, volunteering for good causes, donating to charities committed to justice and considering carefully how we use our own purchasing power: are we sure that we are not contributing to exploitation or injustice?

To find out what is already happening in the Caritas Social Action Network and to keep up to date with or **Do Justice campaign**, please visit www.dojustice.co.uk.

Join us in the work of justice. Together we can make a difference, we can work towards a world that God would approve of, a civilisation of love.

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DO JUSTICE

"Not everyone who is socially or politically involved is a Christian. But someone can hardly call themselves a Christian if they are not socially involved. The Gospel very emphatically leads people to commit themselves to love, justice, freedom and peace. When Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, he does not just heal and save individual human beings; rather, he starts a new form of community - a kingdom of peace and justice."

DOCAT (66)

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