DIOCESE OF CHICHESTER

TO KNOW · LOVE · FOLLOW JESUS

OUR LIFE IN CHRIST
THE BISHOP'S CHARGE 2015

CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMON GOOD

1. Introduction

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2.44). This translation in the King James Version of the Bible sounds a bit odd to the modern ear, particularly in the use of the word, "common".

The Greek word for common, *koinos*, is one that we have already noted as the root word for fellowship or communion.[1] Its use here is slightly different. In this statement Luke is writing about something shared in, or used, by everyone. This is the sense in which we speak of the Book of Common Prayer, or Common Worship, something like an open space that is 'a common'.

Luke uses the word elsewhere in Acts in a way that adds another dimension to what common means. It occurs in the story of Peter and Cornelius, when Peter has a vision in which he is invited to eat food that is unclean. With characteristic consistency the King James Version translates Peter's response as, "I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (Acts 10.14). The New Revised Standard Version has, "I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean".

The NRSV rendering of *koinos* as profane is a legitimate translation, but it suggests a shadow side to commonality. This is the shadow of something being made dirty by overuse, like the grubby upholstery on the arm of a sofa in a pub or the waiting room of a railway station. It suggests that the character of having something in common is capable of being ambiguous, now wholly good or wholly bad. The range of uses that we associate with a common as public open space suggests further examples of this ambiguity.

Smithfield, in the City of London, was originally known as smooth field. It was a place where roads converged and people came together into an open, common space used for trade, celebration, execution and martyrdom. It is still known as an ancient marketplace for

[1] See above, p. 22.

meat and poultry, for the annual Bartholomew fair, (named after the local church and the hospital, and immortalised in Ben Johnson's play), and as the place where people were burnt at the stake.

These associations indicate the diversity of meaning that the word *koinos* conveys. When we speak of the common good, we could also make reference to other phrases that come close to what we are describing. The public square, the market place, the global village: these all refer to a designation of commonality where a variety of different contributions can legitimately be made.

It is perhaps helpful for us to recognise that within our own linguistic tradition as Christians, something common can be readily associated with what it good, just as it can describe what is regarded as unclean. The fear of uncleanliness that gripped Peter still lurks within the new dispensation of Christianity. Even though dietary regulations have been lifted, fear of the material world, and of the body itself, as potentially profane and grubby is a propensity that has skewed Christian discipleship from its earliest days.[2]

This sense that the world – a dimension that represents everything we experience and have in common as created beings – is hostile and antagonistic to our faith, can emerge from a careless reading of scripture that distorts the scope of Paul's injunction, "Do not be conformed to this world" (Romans 12.2).[3] However, the theology that Jesus puts on record is more positive about the destiny of creation: "For God so loved the world" (John 3.16).

Although the creation is loved by God, and although its existence and destiny have been restored by Jesus Christ through his incarnation, death and resurrection, we still live in a provisional context in which systems of unjust, material and moral disordering are able to flourish. Recognising this, John's gospel speaks in a technical sense of "the world" as a distortion of reality, distinguishing it from God's beautiful creation in which the reality of heaven can be perfectly reflected. This distortion is the realm of "the prince of this world" (John 14.30).

The distinction between these two aspects of "the world" takes us again to the use of the word *koinos*, common, to describe on the one hand the coherence and unity of things held in common and on the other hand the grubbiness of misuse that is described as profanity.

The commonality of our life together on the earth is also viewed by Paul as something that has a beautiful but provisional quality to it. He reminds us that "the present form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7.31) and his letters to the Thessalonians convey a sense of urgency in the face of an impending end to all things as we now know them.

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[2] This is well documented in Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, women and sexual renunciation in Early Christianity*, Faber, (London) 1988.

[3] The sense of bleakness in creation following the fall of Adam and Eve is graphically expressed in the Catechism of Edward VI: "And forthwith the image of God was defaced in them: and the most beautiful proportion of righteousness, holiness, truth, and knowledge of God, was confounded and in a manner utterly blotted out. There remained the earthly image, joined with unrighteousness, guile, fleshly mind, and deep ignorance of godly and heavenly things. Hereof grew the weakness of our flesh: hereof came this corruption, and disorder of lusts and affections: hereof came that pestilence wherewith mankind is infected, and it is called sin original." The Catechism, in Liturgies of Edward VI ed. J Ketley, Cambridge (Parker Society), 1844 pp 501-3.

But that does not detract from Paul's conviction that "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8.21). In this conviction, Paul tilts the commonality of our life as created beings away from profanity and towards the vocation of glorious perfection.

Experiencing the inescapable human trials that bring us to the outcome of glory is another way of describing our conviction of a shared destiny, in the common good and the glory of life in heaven. At the same time, we retain a moral and spiritual hold upon the material, provisional nature of life in this world because, as Paul recognises, it is already in the process of giving birth to the glory of perfection.

So when the author of the letter to the Hebrews describes the archetypes of faith in Israel as "strangers and pilgrims", he makes it clear that living in the world is a pre-condition to "desiring a better country, that is a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11.13,16).

The sense that life now, and life in heaven, are not disconnected destinies is therefore something that matters deeply to Christians and has done since the outset of the church's mission.

The fragment of a 2nd or possibly 3rd century document, known as the letter to Diognetus, beautifully describes the self-understanding of Christians who live in the world but with a conviction of being also the citizens of heaven. "Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives…War is waged against them as aliens by the Jews, and persecution is carried on against them by the Greeks, and yet those that hate them cannot tell the reason for their hostility. In a word, what the soul is in a body, this the Christians are in the world."[4]

What motivates the Christian to obey the established law and surpass it is a theology of the incarnation that sees the image of God in each human person. Our commonality as human persons contains within itself the capacity to be the material in which the new creation of glory is already taking shape, as Paul describes in his letter to the Romans. At the same time, this is also the body in which the destructive forces of sin exists, and through which the prince of this world extends an addiction to destructive behaviour.

The Christian who believes that he or she can be insulated or insured against the qualities of commonality that embodiment represents is seriously mistaken. There is an extent to which the exploitative aspect of commonality, the misuse or over-use of what we share, is inescapable. The grubbiness of sin touches us all as a symptom of our footprint on the earth, making the world a less lovely place to be.

Engagement with the common good will therefore confront us, inevitably, with profanity in many different forms. The bold recognition of this is what faces those who nonetheless seek the beauty and holiness of commonality, particularly in sacramental signs through which the vision of creation redeemed and perfected is presented to us.

Nor are we the first to recognise this truth. Archbishop William Temple (1881-1944) stresses that the revelation of God in creation cannot be confined within the limits of our expectations: "Only if [God] is revealed in the history of the Syrians and Philistines can He

[4] *The Epistle to Diognetus,* 5 – 6, in JB Lightfoot (ed), *The Apostolic Fathers,* Macmillan & Co, (London), p. 506.

be revealed in the history of Israel; only if he chooses all men for His own can He choose any at all; only if nothing is profane can anything be sacred."[5] Salvation is a process that restores the whole creation and all human history. Nothing is left grubby or misused: all is revealed as sacred – its true identity.

In our own time the pastoral letter of the Church of England's House of Bishops, entitled *Who is my Neighbour?*[6], turned attention to the interconnectedness of our life, as the nation prepared to for the 2015 general election. At the same time, a collection of essays was published, entitled *On Rock or Sand?* edited by John Sentamu, archbishop of York.

In the introduction, Archbishop Sentamu asserts the importance of religion as an essential contribution to the exercise of law through judicial process, under the scrutiny of morality. In support of this, he quotes Lord Denning, who observed that "although religion, law and morals can be separated, they are nevertheless still very dependent on one another. Without religion, there can be no morality, there can be no law".[7]

From a theological point of view, we seek to ask further questions about what accounts for this inter-dependency of religion, morality and law. At the centre of this dependency is the nature of the human person and the character of the relationships that we create. 'Solidarity' is a term that might help to elucidate the theological scope of human relationships as lived out through religion, morality and law.

Solidarity will be known by many as the name of a popular movement in Poland that contributed to the overthrow of the soviet bloc in the late 20th century. It identified injustice in the rule of law and the morality of political process. The inspiration for its energy came very explicitly from Christianity – a massively strong Roman Catholic population.

Solidarity was not simply a name; it was also a theological term that describes the interdependency of human life. The human person is uniquely constituted as an individual, but uniformly characterised as bearing the image of God, which is the hallmark of an inviolable dignity. Moreover, this commonality, the image of God, is expressive of the capacity of God to become one like us.

So solidarity is also a vehicle for understanding our unity in Jesus Christ that identifies him with all of us, and us with him in the life of the divine Trinity. So, to sum up this truth, Irenaeus can write in the second century that "God became what we are in order to make us what he is himself".[8]

Solidarity in our love of Jesus Christ commits us to solidarity with all the members of the human race whom he loves and redeems. It commits us to attending to the nature of the societies in which we live, respecting difference but demanding consistency of recognition of virtue.

In an age of heightened global awareness this solidarity also opens up for us new questions about our treatment of the earth, our global greed for using its resources, and the

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[5] William Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, London (Macmillan), 1935, p.306
[6] www.churchofengland.org/GeneralElection2015
[7] John Sentamu (ed.), *On Rock or Sand: Firm foundations for Britain's future, London (SPCK) 2015, p.14.*
[8] Irenaeus, Against the Heresies, 5

inequalities, with the penalty of poverty, disease, war and displacement of peoples, that flow as a consequence.

Solidarity (the movement) asserted that solidarity (the theological vision) cannot simply remain an entry in the textbook. It demands action and engagement. It also demands from us humility and compassion. In contrast to the sense of engagement at arm's length, a sanitized, institutional response, Rowan Williams has astutely observed "how deeply the coercive and impersonal ethos of a good deal of traditional religion has alienated the culture at large".[9]

People are attracted by human warmth. They respond to vulnerability and long to see that Christians also respond to vulnerability in ways that are commensurate with a deep and widely-held, residual expectation that God is good, kind, loving, and merciful, as Jesus showed us.

The language that attracts people to Pope Francis as a Christian leader speaks with an immediacy and personal understanding of what touches our hearts and prompts us to look for someone to listen to our needs. Pope Francis directs us to the Bible, inviting us to look for the God of mercy revealed in Jesus Christ, and to form a personal relationship with him. "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ." "Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him...opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness."[10]

Commitment to the common good is not an add-on extra to the Christian vocation; it is core activity. An earlier Pope, Paul VI, encouraged this language in the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* (Joy and Hope), which speaks of a church that "cherishes a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history, [that] is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God".[11]

The visitation explored our commitment to this engagement through article 65, which asks, "What participation do people in your congregation have in the wider life of the local community?"

The presentments indicate that the level of participation is diverse and expansive. This is an example of how lay people are the vanguard of the church's mission, taking an active, determined and imaginative lead in showing the mercy of God through action that responds to need.

A comment from the presentments observed that "we need effective ways to reach and be known in our community". Opening the doors of our churches is perhaps a start, inviting others to come in. But it should also be a signal that we need to bless and send out the agents of the gospel congregated safely inside.

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[9] Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, London (Bloomsbury) 2012, p. 96.
[10] Pope Francis: *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) (2013), para 3; *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy) (2015) para 1, 3.
[11] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 1, 40.

The opening of the doors is something that will inaugurate 2016 as of a Year of Mercy, beginning this coming Advent. An outline of the intention of the Year of Mercy is given below.

I do not propose to list in detail all the ways that we are contributing to the common good. And unlike the two previous sections (growth in holiness and number, and reimagining ministry) this section of the charge does not conclude with a list of recommendations.

Instead, I have listed below some headings that describe the areas in which presentments indicated existing engagement or called for further work to be done.

But there will be one specific development of staffing to encourage our further development in contributing to the common good. The new archdeacon of Hastings will be given a particular responsibility for promoting this aspect of our apostolic life, looking particularly at the needs of communities, urban and rural, which experience deprivation and social exclusion, together with attending to provision we make for people of black and minority ethnic origin.

My hope is that this list will be a provisional one. As parishes assess the "one thing" they identify as the way forward in expanding and deepening their apostolic life, I hope that new examples of contribution to the common good could be added, enriching the diversity of our engagement under the headings outlined below.

This would be an indication of how the charge and the strategy are grounded in directing our attention to the energising and resourcing the local church, where Christians are alert to the needs of its community and respond as an expression of what it means to know, love, follow Jesus.

2. Commitment to action: The Year of Mercy 2016

The Year of Mercy draws out a theme from the Bible that invites us to respond to the most pressing needs in our world today. In a study on this biblical theme, Cardinal Walter Kasper observes that "in the twenty-first century we live with the threat of ruthless terrorism, outrageous injustice, abused and starving children, millions of people in flight, increasing persecution of Christians and – in addition – devastating natural catastrophes."[12]

Faced by these traumas, where are we, in our global community, to find mercy?

The Year of Mercy invites us to open the doors of our churches and invite people in to find the mercy of God. We, fallible but faithful Christians, are those God has called and empowered to response to those who seek mercy, which is seen most fully in Jesus Christ.

The Year will begin in Advent 2015, with the symbolic opening of a door in Chichester cathedral. It is an enacted parable. Jesus described himself as the door and gateway to salvation (John 10.7). When we open the doors of our churches we invite those who are burdened to find the mercy of compassion and freedom and rekindled hope.

[12] Walter Kasper, Mercy: The essence of the gospel and the key to Christian life, Paulist Press (New York) 1913, p.1

This parable also commits those who might feel protected from the challenges of Christian witness in a hostile age to open the doors and go out into a needy world, empowered by the Holy Spirit to be merciful, like the Father.

The Year of Mercy has also drawn us into a partnership with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, as we seek to make a shared response to the crisis in Syria.

In recognition of this, the Bishop of Arundel and Brighton will join me for the opening of the Year of Mercy door and Evensong in Chichester cathedral on Sunday 6 December at 3.30 pm. Then on Sunday 17 December I shall join him for the opening of the Year of Mercy door and Vespers at the cathedral in Arundel at 0.00 pm.

There will also be a Lent Course on the theme of the Year of Mercy. The course has been prepared for the diocese of Chichester by Canon Anthony Cane and Canon Andrew Mayes. Other material for parish and personal use will also be available.

3. Areas of contribution to the common good

3.1 Education

Only 59 Presentments explicitly identified school when responding to article 65, "What participation do people in your congregation have in the wider life of the local community?" This response is quite limited, given that we have 158 church schools, each needing skilled and committed foundation governors. We must ensure our best response to this invaluable opportunity.

Of course, the phrasing of the question might have led some people to look beyond the church's own structures. It was very good to learn on my visits that in some parishes where there is no church school clergy and laity still play an important role in the local state school.

It is worth remembering that the Church of England took the lead in the movement towards the provision of free education, through the establishment of the National Society over 200 years ago. In terms of the scope of this contribution to the common good, it was rightly understood that education is a key with which to unlock the chains of deprivation.

Our commitment to education is also an investment in the process of nurture that gives a child access to their spiritual life and the Christian tradition as a vehicle for its exploration. At a purely cultural and educational level, this vehicle also delivers knowledge about a tradition that has been formative of our literature, art, music, architecture and theatre.

Schools, especially church schools, should form a bridge between our contribution to the common good and the worshipping life of a congregation in our household of faith.

3.2 Local Charities

53 presentments mentioned local charities in which members of our congregations have a leading role. Among the important aspects of this contribution to the common good is support given freely to make possible a sustained and appropriate response to a local need.

One of the best examples of this is the Worthing Churches Homeless Projects. This initiative started in 1991 by taking hot soup and bedding to homeless people on the beach in Worthing. It now responds in different ways to 1000 people a year, and is supported by 200 volunteers.

Faith empowered those who saw a need and knew that their calling was to reveal the mercy of God in action.

3.3 Food Banks and Debt Counselling

This response is widespread across the diocese. It reveals the reality that need exists in many different places, often most acute where least expected. Chichester food bank tells that story. Rural deprivation hovers around the lives of many affluent parishes, and is often more difficult to address than the needs that emerge in urban areas.

3.4 Family Support Work

Because this charity has an historic link with the diocese, it is widely supported in at deanery and parish level. 2015 has FSW celebrate 125 years of delivery of support to families. Its history has required it to adapt to the changing needs of family life. Those needs are changing more rapidly than ever, as are the demands on those who seek to offer support.

The requirement to address change is a positive statement about ensuring that whatever our contribution to the common good might be, it must always begin with the needs that others identify, not our perception of what they need or deserve.

3.5 Uniformed organisations

This remains a significant element in the church's provision of facilities for young people. The benefits of these groupings lie in a strong sense of identity (the uniform), progression through childhood to young adulthood, and achievement of a sense of self-esteem by graded measures (collecting badges).

3.6 The arts

This important area had many different expression of interest in the presentments. Local arts festivals, many using church buildings, was the most common. But it also included the work of the church organist and other musicians, flower festivals, and the parish pantomime (a very distinctive art form!).

In terms of the wider contribution to the arts, many of our buildings represent in themselves a collection of important works of art that could rival the quality in some museums. The quality of some funerary monuments, wall paintings, textiles, woodwork,

stained glass and metalwork is outstanding, and forms a discrete collection that narrates a slice of the nation's history.

3.7 The environment

In terms of the church's contribution to the built environment, our church buildings continue the theme of the common good expressed as a repository of history and collective memory. Evidence of this in an external context was given recently when the historian Tom Holland assessed the destruction by Isis of the temple of Bel in Palmyra. He spoke of it as a symbol of people who had "upheld different traditions [and] had nevertheless managed to come together and fashion something wondrous.

Assessing how we attend to the sustainability of our buildings, the contribution that they make to the skyline and character of village, town, and city, is now a matter for urgent consideration. It cannot be simply for the benefit of a worshipping congregation; our vision must ensure that we first reach to heaven, but also make reference to the dimensions of history, past, present and future. Ensuring that buildings can be a benefit not a burden will require imagination, and clarity of purpose if termination of their use or existence is the right and best way forward.

The natural environment is also a dimension for which we bear considerable responsibility. The project that Miles King and Mark Betson worked on to produce *The Nature of God's Acre* makes an important statement about the church's commitment to the earth as a matter of theological principle. It also identifies, by way of a worked example, how in many of our churchyards the story of death and new life is uniquely demonstrated in sites that go back, in some cases, to Saxon times.

3.8 Civic, political, and economic life

35 presentments mentioned a member of the congregation who has a leading role in public life. This is an important expression of the church's contribution to the common good and the outworking of what it means to be apostolic; sent to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of the world's affairs.

It is invariably lay women and men who speak for the Christian faith in forums where decisions are made that affect the lives of others. Encouraging and supporting those who undertake this ministry demands appropriate, particular, discreet and prayerful attention within the Christian community.