



Pope Benedict XVI said, "A humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism. Only a humanism open to the Absolute can guide us in the promotion and building of forms of social and civic life — structures, institutions, culture and ethos — without exposing us to the risk of becoming ensnared by the fashions of the moment."[\[1\]](#)

Values are not found in isolation, but by interaction with practices by institutions and individuals. Good values feed good practices and the evidence of good practice builds good values. They're in an iterative relationship. Certainly within the UK the strength of values has been recognised pragmatically. And in fact there's a lot of talk about values at the moment - one of the things that stimulated me to speak on this. Simply to state them, however often and however clearly, as being, for example, those put forward by OFSTED – democracy, the rule of law, and respect or tolerance of other faiths and traditions – does not make them British values. To become British values they need British actors, who play them with such conviction and effect that they become what they claim. We will look at the actors tomorrow.

That 'becoming' will not happen with the values listed from OFSTED, because although they are good, they are not especially British. They are not part of our history, and there is a barely acknowledged hypocrisy in them. Where was democracy in the Empire? Do we respect Dr Martin Luther King, Archbishop Tutu, Nelson Mandela or Gandhi because they observed the rule of law or because they broke the law in the service of deeper values? How do we find the limits of tolerance? These are values that are good, but are near the surface, useful but not weight-bearing.

But what things are weight-bearing? Yesterday I spoke of the need for a generous and beautiful and even extravagant practise of values. Over the course of this evening I will be suggesting that we need to be confident and courageous in asserting values that are embedded in our history. And I'm putting them in three groups: what sticks us together (cohesion), what drives us forward (courage) and what enables us to keep going (consistency). Towards the end of this evening (rather like the BA pilot announcing 40 minutes to landing, or the dentist saying just a brush and polish, you will know when I say this that it is almost over) I am going to look at three areas in which these have been applied: health, housing and education – or in which they need to be applied.

The reflection starts with a moment of failure in the Holy Week story, Peter's denial of Christ, which was read in Morning Prayer this morning.

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." 68 But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt.[\[a\]](#) Then the cock crowed.[\[b\]](#) 69 And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." 70 But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." 71 But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." 72 At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept."[\[2\]](#)

Once again, like last night I am only going to pick a couple of aspects of this passage.

Firstly, that Peter was alone. The disciples had all scattered, losing any sense of belonging to one another, of being together. It is a rare thing for values to be practised in isolation - they can be, but it's a rare thing and takes an exceptional person.

Secondly, Peter was acting without any sense of direction. He was neither in nor out, not courageous nor cowardly, going with the flow. Isolation combined with lack of direction will always undermine our determination to do what is right.

And thirdly, Peter lacked the means of being consistent. He could not sustain his own desires, nor face challenge resiliently. Consistent good practise - over a lifetime, over a society - requires feeding and nurturing, communities that carry the weak, and teach the strong. Behind any statement of values is the question of what will enable those under pressure to flourish, not merely survive.

Cohesion

So what sticks us together, gives cohesion? Cohesion is one of the great antidotes to insecurity and thus to bad values, because it speaks to us of the assurance that 'we are all in it together'. It is reached with a sense of commonality. Cohesion -sticking together - is open to arguments and diversity, in fact welcomes them, but sets limits, a boundary line, within which actions are taken - it says 'thus far and no further'. I want to suggest that cohesion is the first group of values that we find in our history, but need reaffirming in our policy. Most recently in our history with the Beveridge report and the resulting enactments of measures to combine what he called the five giants: want, disease, squalor, ignorance and idleness. Legislation during and after the war consciously addressed the challenge of the giants; practice and policy were intertwined. Practise included the 1944 Education Act, the 1946 the National Insurance Act, the 1946 Industrial Injuries Act, the New Towns Act and the National Health Service Act, and the 1948 National Assistance Act. These are all policies of cohesion, of belonging to one another. Policy was implemented through building houses. Politics remained fierce, but there was a clear link between values and actions that meant that the changes made lasted in some cases until today as fundamental principles of the way the UK understands human flourishing.

To go much further back, St Benedict founded his monastic rule on this ideal of cohesion: a rule which not only gave the context for Christian living in an age of barbarism, but incidentally saved European civilisation in the early mediaeval period we call the Dark Ages. Much more recently, in the 1930s Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer formed a most remarkable community both to train pastors and to do so by living a life in common, and in resistance to the oppressive and demonic power of the Nazi state. He did not go by himself but he formed a community.

The basis of modern Christian thinking about cohesion, what sticks us together, goes back to 1891 when Pope Leo XIII published an encyclical (a letter to all the faithful) entitled *Rerum Novarum* (in English it's rather inadequately translated as "On Capital and Labour"). It was the beginning of a series of encyclicals, continued to this day, in which are set out the main aspects of what is often referred to as Catholic Social Teaching, the

applied outworking of the good news of Jesus Christ in terms of social structures and social justice - what does this gospel mean in how we order ourselves as a society? They were aimed at cohesion, at how to bind together the whole of society increasingly separated by wealth and all forms of inequality.

It is a complex body of thought, but amongst the key and most influential aspects are five principles which need renewed focus now. They are the universal destination of goods (what exists is for everyone), gratuity, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity. There are others but I want to pick those. To some extent they speak for themselves, as they paint a picture of a society in which caring for the neighbour ranks ahead of caring for oneself, and it is in our solidarity together that each of us will flourish. It's more than a challenge to individualism and autonomy; it says that they are deceptive, liars that promise liberation and deliver slavery.

Benedict XVI saw that in addition to the five was the need for what he called 'gratuity' – our attitude to surplus. Gratuity is at the heart of being human. He wrote this: "Gratuitousness is present in our lives in many different forms, which often go unrecognised because of a purely consumerist and utilitarian view of life. The human being is made for gift," - I think that is just a beautiful phrase - "which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension."[\[3\]](#) We see gratuity in the carer looking after a child with disabilities, or looking after a parent incapacitated. Too often, as Pope Benedict XVI says, we do not recognise the care as gift, a virtue and good in itself, but talk in terms of economic effect alone - of course economic effect matters - but at the heart of it is gift.

Gratuity springs from a sense of "love-in-action", a reaching out simply because there are human beings with needs, and whose call to us is recognised in the common good.

The common good is the sharpest and most uncomfortable challenge to our financially centred society. The common good looks not to averages (or even the mean, or median income) but to the totality of flourishing of a group. A living example of the problem is in the Eurozone. Average incomes across Europe are high compared to the rest of the world, yet Greece in particular (and other countries especially in Southern Europe) are imprisoned by debt. The common good calls to us because we are in solidarity - the next value - with those in need.

The best definition of solitary is summed up beautifully and succinctly in John Donne's poem:

'No man is an island,

Entire of itself,

Every man is a piece of the continent,

A part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea,

Europe is the less.

As well as if a promontory were.

As well as if a manor of thy friend's

Or of thine own were:

Any man's death diminishes me,

Because I am involved in mankind,

And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;

It tolls for thee.'[\[4\]](#)

The challenge of solidarity is the challenge to care for those with whom we have connections. Because we're human. In the age of social media that is essentially the whole world. That's an extraordinary thing isn't it. When my grandmother was first back from India where her father was working, she wrote to him - and she got a letter back weeks later. And now she would be Facetiming him! And the fact that I'm in a WhatsApp group means I know a great deal more about the eating habits of my latest grandson. And thus the culture of sensing loss must be developed not so as to paralyse us before the endless suffering of human beings, but to call us to belong to one another.

A friend of mine, a bishop in the Congo, was asked about the number of refugees in the area where he lives. He said: "Oh, around two million." When I asked him how he coped, what he did in the face of such unmeetable needs, he said, "We do what we can, what God enables us to do." That is as good a definition of solidarity as Donne's.

Solidarity is a value which resists gross inequality but seeks for the gain of others so that all may gain. Despite Donne's words about a bit of Europe going missing, he is not being called in aid of resistance to Brexit, but rather of commitment to finding a new way in which as a country we are bound to the rest of the world.

And finally, another word, far more spoken of than acted on, is subsidiarity. The principal is simple. All actions and decisions in any group or organisation should be taken at the lowest possible level, at the most local level. It sounds obvious, but everything militates against it, especially our growing capacity in information technology and in systems.

A few years ago I was visiting the chief executive of the county council where I was working. He had just returned from London, over 200 miles

away, and a visit to the Department of Education. There he had been shown a system which was able to tell him how many children there were in his nearest primary school Year 3 group had learning difficulties, and what progress they had made that term. Rather than being impressed he was concerned, and asked why the Department kept information on such a granular basis. The reply was that they needed to monitor his efficiency, and to know what could be done. It's a conflict between information and action. Just because we can do something never means we automatically should.

Subsidiarity is challenging and frightening because it assumes that there will be failures, while claiming that local responsibilities, and local knowledge will be more important in resisting oppression, misjudgement and cruelty than central systems.

The results are usually messy, often inefficient, but they give a deep sense of local responsibility to those who have to make things happen. They do not always prevent trouble, and in some areas they have failed, most seriously and most tragically in the prevention of the abuse of children and vulnerable adults. The Church of England - believe it or not - a model of subsidiarity. It is not based in a few people at the 'top', whatever that means (it is a concept disliked by Jesus to start with and most of the best leaders since) but on the 8,000 and more local parishes, chaplaincies, groups, who will continue doing what they do pretty well regardless of what happens or what is said at some self-imagined grand central level of decision making. But we are genuinely a picture of subsidiarity and God forbid that we should give up on it because it's untidy. I will return to subsidiarity tomorrow when I talk about the actors in reimagining Britain, especially the intermediate institutions.

Courage

A vibrant, flexible and dynamic culture needs more than cohesion. The values of sticking together do not start with where human beings merely are, that is to say they do not start with our nature which tends to be selfish, but assume an acceptance of self-discipline that imposes selflessness on ourselves. Peter and the other disciples might have stuck together - that would have been one thing. But they needed more – above all courage, which is my second group of values.

The values of Catholic social teaching are an expression of what is implicit in our culture when it is at its best; they emerge from the Christian tradition which is our heritage as a nation, and as such also apply throughout Europe and other nations shaped by Christianity. Yet they risk being static in a world which is intensely fluid and changing, whether as a result of technology, communications, travel, migration or other forms of globalisation.

And that's why the second group of values which seem to me to be implicit in our history and culture are those around courage, a dynamic group of values which relate most closely to the needs of our future and to the nature of human beings. Once again, the list is endless, but I'm going to pick three to focus on: aspiration, creativity and competition.

A society without aspiration will become inward looking, complacent and self-regarding. Cohesion without aspiration leads to a rights-based culture. Aspiration without cohesion leads to isolated failure. Peter had some vague aspiration 'not to betray' - he said it - but his isolation left him vulnerable. The church after Pentecost was the greatest example in history of a group which held together and was full of aspiration, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the breath of growth and development.

Creativity is the necessary companion of aspiration in a world that is more than zero sum. If all I need to fulfil my aspirations is to seize what belongs to others, I need not create. But if I want to add to the world then something new must appear. The first chapters of the Bible speak of a God whose very nature is creative, and who imprints that nature in human beings. In our creativity of all kinds, from engineering to art, we show ourselves to be made in the image of God.

When education fails to put in aspiration and creativity, it fails people's most sourly. Creativity is the greatest gift to the common good. Its side effects may be damaging as in the Industrial Revolutions, but its capacity to improve health and life, to give generously to human flourishing, is colossal. Values that do not include creativity or are not expressed in creativity and do not liberate the creative spirit will inevitably constrain human flourishing.

But it implies taking risks, creativity expects to fail. And thus accepting failures as a normal part of human experience and of the experience of society. A set of values that rejects failure, or refuses to recognise it, will condemn itself to deceit and ultimate failure^[5].

Competition is natural to human beings and must be recognised in our values as something which may lead to human flourishing. It's always existed in terms of access to resources, in sport and in entertainment - even when they open the wrong envelope - in business and in trade. The benefits of competition in a healthy economy with reasonable regulation are understood by economists as driving up services and improving the efficiency of what happens in economic transactions. And even within the church, St Paul tells the Roman Christians to "outdo one another in showing honour" (Romans 12:10).

All systems of values must link not only to the tradition of the virtues, as expressed implicitly in a particular culture, but also to the nature of human beings. The theological anthropology - how we are with God as human beings - is as important as the ethics. Without understanding a little of what makes a human being, values are no more than ethical castles in the air. However, there are natural and almost insuperable contradictions between values of cohesion and the values of courage, and they must be linked and drawn together and harmonised by the third group, the values of consistency - a 'stick-at-it-ness'.

Consistency

Aspiration, creativity and competition all generate conflict and uncertainty. The inevitable corruption that attends all human activity leads

necessarily to enmity, to seeking monopoly and market fixing, to falsification and to abuses of the weak.

Values of consistency are those which give an overall system of values a capacity to be generative of healing when things go wrong: through reconciliation, resilience and sustainability it is possible to have both the mechanisms and impulses that bring together cohesion and courage.

Reconciliation is the transformation of destructive conflict into creative and dynamic diversity which encourages growth and development. It rejects coercion and embraces difference within the broadest possible limits that still maintain cohesion. It encourages competition, aspiration and creativity, but enables them to be part of the working whole, not a means of gaining power at the expense of others.

The costs of failing to have systems and mechanisms for reconciliation are huge, and a society in which the concept does not exist is doomed to anarchy and to hatred, because the heart of reconciliation is forgiveness. [\[6\]](#) Every household develops some sort of technique of reconciliation, although they are not always healthy ones. In nation states the development of democracy is a means of reconciling competing stories of how flourishing should happen and competing groups who seek power. One might say that general elections are essentially reconciled civil war.

There is no single, effective model for reconciliation, but there are some basic principles. Reconciliation is the process by which diversity is accepted and even welcomed, without sliding towards oppression by the dominant power. It starts with a rejection of unanimity or absolute conformity, let alone the use of coercion. [\[7\]](#) In its constant struggle against the human desire for dominance reconciliation and the reconciled as well as the reconcilers must sacrifice their own advantage. It is a costly business with an outcome that will not normally satisfy anyone, but which enables all to flourish to a degree compatible with the flourishing of those with whom they disagree.

In Christian understanding we live this week the paradigmatic act of reconciliation in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, with the empowering sending of the Holy Spirit. The cost is huge, the life of the Son of God. There is no coercion, both the one offering the means of reconciliation and the ones to whom it is offered are free to choose. Its outcomes are new relationships with God, with the community of believers, with the world, even with enemies, all of whom are loved with the overflowing love given by the Father through Jesus in the Holy Spirit.

The cost of reconciliation springs from the enormity of its positive possibilities. Something so wonderful, so great, so beautiful, is bound to cost. The greatest example to date in human history is the reconciliation of the countries of Western Europe since 1945. When the two halves of the twentieth century are compared in our region of the world, the first half is almost nothing but tyranny, bloodshed and cruelty beyond words. The second half is mainly in Western Europe (not entirely) of steady growth, concern for the weak, the progressive reduction of barriers of all sorts, and the development of generosity of spirit which has given what may well be argued to be a golden age for Europe, at least in comparison to the centuries preceding it.

Again Peter is our example of reconciliation. For the three denials by the fire outside the High Priest's house were forgiven and redeemed by the

three affirmations by the fire next to the Lake, when Jesus met him and healed him.

To achieve such a change will always require huge sacrifice: the very example of Jesus is that the cost is enormous to bring it about. It's sometimes impossible. The nature of human evil means that there are those who seek only to be able to rule or act without accountability and without concern for others. Yet without reconciliation as an assumed value, in our society the only other road leads to the Hobbesian description of human life without order, or to avoid such disasters, to coercion and the use of power as the only final resort. Let me quote him:

"In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, not culture of the earth, no navigation, nor the use of commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[\[8\]](#)

Reconciliation leads us on to resilience. The resilience of societies and of nations is measured in their capacity not only to deal with shocks and traumas, but also to maintain their values in times of prosperity and flourishing.

Resilience requires sustainability.

There are limits to human endurance and to the endurance of societies. There comes a time when, even in the greatest causes, human beings feel that they can do no more.

To be sustainable values must be mutually encouraged, they must provide for failure and not condemn people who fall short, and they must make honesty about ourselves easier. They must also be seen in our actions, in order that they be embedded in our thinking. The greatest test of modern governments is not policy, we have those coming out of our ears, but implementation.

And so I turn briefly to three examples.

Education, housing and health are the cornerstones of reimagining Britain and have been since the 19th century. They ensure the possibility of human flourishing and offer the possibility of aspirations for a better future being turned into reality. They convert values of solidarity and the common good into practices of households, care and development. They convert longings into courageous aspirations. They give consistency and sustainability to talents and gifts. So in the last part of this evening I will look very briefly indeed, with much less detail than I would like, at the application of these values to those three critical areas of housing, education and health.

No society or country can flourish without an education system that is world class, and that offers every person who chooses to take it the possibility of living 'life in all its fullness', a phrase used by Jesus[\[9\]](#) in John 10:10 and picked up as the theme of the Church of England vision for

education of the million children in our schools.

There is a globally established and ancient reality that the children of privilege tend to inherit privilege, especially in terms of access to health, housing and education. For example, at Harvard, around 12% of children have parents who went to Harvard University.^[10] There is a similar pattern in China. Life chances always have been and always are improved by ancestry, except in times of global war, pandemic, economic collapse or revolution. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse are the only inevitable equalisers.

There is also a degree to which poverty and deprivation also pass through the generations. The Casey Review of late 2016, although mainly about integration and immigration, described other challenges almost incidentally. One of the most striking tables was of the ethnic breakdown of children on free school meals (a rough and ready proxy for poverty) who achieved five A*-C grade GCSEs at 16. The levels vary enormously through the 18 different ethnic categories of the Office of National Statistics, but white British comes third last, with only 32% of girls and 28% of boys achieving this standard.

That last is a figure that shows by itself the need to reimagine Britain's values. Any educational system must be tested against the values I have spoken of earlier. Will it make us stick better together? Will it improve courage, aspiration, ambition and competition? Is it sustainable? Do you see in it the common good, solidarity, when we hear that the poorest members of the largest part of our population fall behind, not by their own fault.

We can pick similar examples in health and housing.

In 1854 a severe outbreak of Cholera in London around the area of Soho led to Dr John Snow and a local curate, the Reverend Henry Whitehead, realising that contaminated water was the cause of the cholera. This was a crucial turning point in both epidemiology and public health, as the discovery contributed to the decision to build a sewage system, under the guidance of the engineer John Bazalgette. In the 20th century the Clean Air Acts in the UK from 1956 until the 1990s contributed to a huge change in air quality, especially in London. In the Great Smog of 1952 it is estimated that as many as 12,000 premature deaths resulted. That led to the concentration on improving air quality through the use of smokeless fuel.

Inequalities of diet, health education, lifestyle and general quality of life have a long term and chronic impact on life expectancy, and they are seldom addressed without a crisis. The indifference to massive life quality differentials needs to change if we are to have a flourishing future in this country and that means values. Historic attitudes may have needed a crisis to change them, but the response drew on a sense of the common good and solidarity. One part of the answer was public health.

There is also an added complexity, which is that public and mental health are increasingly obviously linked. Mental health issues afflict those on

low incomes as a result of the many pressures and strains of poverty.^[11] Prisons are notoriously places where a large proportion of those held need good mental health provision. Mental health issues affect the capacity to study for teenagers and students, the possibility of obtaining and holding a job, and the ability to form and maintain stable long term relationships. In other words they undermine cohesion, aspiration and resilience.

In housing, if we are to build communities rather than simply build houses, we need to address the dysfunctions caused by ever-rising house prices and the consequent drive to own a house as an investment. We need also to ensure that houses are built and communities developed in such a way as to cause local economies to thrive and thus local people to thrive.

These are all just brief examples, but they illustrate how far we have allowed a disconnection in our society between values and practises, a disconnection that undermines our futures. Tomorrow I will conclude these three talks by looking at the actors who enable practises and values to be learned and some other key areas for their application.

^[1] *Caritas in Veritate* 2009 paragraph 78

^[2] Mark 14:66-72

^[3] *idem* paragraph 35

^[4] John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* 17, 1624

^[5] 'We Never Make Mistakes: Two Short Novels' by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 1963 is a powerful reflection on exactly the problem of lack of creativity and acceptance of failure

^[6] There is an apocryphal story that there is no word for reconciliation in the main language of Mogadishu: if true it explains much.

^[7] For a fascinating case study and discussion of this point see Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'All Things Made New', Allen Lane 2016 pp 118-135, Chapter 9, 'Tolerant Cranmer?'

^[8] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIII.9

^[9] Gospel of John 10:10, Good News Translation

^[10] Justin C. Worland, 'Legacy Admit Rate at 30 Percent' (The Harvard Crimson, May 11 2011),

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