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An Anglican Common Good?

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Abstract: This article examines recent use of the key phrase "common good" in Catholic Social Teaching as well as the Anglican tradition. It explores who first developed the term, and looks at the evidence for Anglican use of it before such language became widespread among Catholics. Use of the "common good" by Henry Scott Holland and William Temple is surveyed. It is argued that first Thomas Hill Green, and secondly Jacques Maritain, are the real architects of modern use of "common good".

Keywords: Common good; Anglican; Thomas Hill Green; Henry Scott Holland; William Temple; Rerum Novarum; Jacques Maritain.

Many Anglicans will be familiar with the petition "honour one another and seek the common good". First introduced in the process of liturgical revision in the 1960s, this phrase has been used in the Intercessory prayers for the Communion service in Series 3, the *ASB*, and also in *Common Worship*. In line with the theological principle *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, the common good is consequently one of the ends of Anglican life, a public confession of what Anglicans collectively desire. But what does the common good mean?

Historically, the phrase "common good" dates all the way back to Platoⁱ and Aristotle.ⁱⁱ It is also found in the works of Thomas Aquinas,ⁱⁱⁱ Richard Hooker,^{iv} and modern thinkers such as Rousseau.^v And yet – and this is important to recognise – such references to the "common good" are often not without ambiguity. Not all "common goods" are exactly the same. And in at least some of these writers, use of the "common good" is infrequent or isolated, perhaps indicating little more than the rather unsurprising fact that many European philosophers had read Aristotle and occasionally reproduced his terminology.

Today, Anglican discussions of the "common good" often ignore these Classical, Scholastic sources, and other more modern sources. Instead, focus is typically placed on Catholic Social Teaching as a normative reference point. To take one prominent and (most surely!) influential example, witness Archbishop Justin Welby's discussion of the common good in his book, Reimagining Britain: here the common good is identified as one of five principles underlying the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. The implied fons et origo is basically Catholic, reaching back to Pope Leo XIII's encyclical of 1891, Rerum Novarum. vi Likewise, the Church of England's current Director of Faith and Public Life, Malcolm Brown, begins a chapter on "The Church of England and the Common Good" with reference to the "living tradition of Catholic Social Teaching". VII According to Brown, the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference document, The Common Good (1996) was key to introducing contemporary Anglicans to the theme. The assumption seems to be that before that point, Anglicans had little interest in it. A little more recently, Nick Spencer of *Theos* has confessed, "It is fair to say that there is not much of a tradition of talking about the Common Good in Anglican social theology". viii Taken together, such statements suggest that Anglican language of the common good is a recent innovation. Moreover, as the Catholic theologian Anna Rowlands politely acknowledges, "Anglicans often describe Catholic social teaching (CST) as a 'gift' from which they can more or less borrow". ix The impression that one might be tempted to form in one's mind is that the "common good" is one of those gifts Catholics have bestowed on Anglicans. But is this really the case?

It is actually fairly straightforward to argue that a distinctive Anglican common good tradition pre-dated modern use of the "common good" in Catholic Social Teaching. This Anglican tradition likely set the context for the adoption of "common good" language by Anglophone Catholics, and provides an explanation for its successful establishment as a term used in political philosophy as well as theology. Of course, this raises questions about the relationship of this Anglican tradition to Catholic Social Teaching, and in what follows I will make a number of suggestions for how we might make sense of the evidence.

To set some context, it is useful to reproduce Dennis McGann's analysis of the use of the term "the common good" in some of the major documents of Catholic Social Teaching. In a chapter written

for a volume titled, *In Search of the Common Good*, McGann counts the number of occurrences of the "the common good" in a series of key texts, arranged in chronological order of publication from 1888.^x To complete the picture, I have modified McGann's table very slightly by including the British Catholic Bishops' *The Common Good and Catholic Social Teaching* (1996).

No. of "common good"	Document	Year
3	Leo XIII's Libertas	1888
7	Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum	1891
3	U.S. Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction	1919
16	Pius XI's Quadragesimo anno	1931
20	John XXIII's Mater et magistra	1961
47	John XXIII's Pacem in terris	1963
28	Vatican II's Gaudium et spes	1965
6	Paul VI's Populorum progressio	1967
8	Paul VI's Octagesima adveniens	1971
7	John Paul II's Laborem exercens	1981
34	U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference, <i>Economic Justice for All</i>	1986
11	John Paul II's Solilicitudo rei socialis	1987
16	John Paul II's Centesimus annus	1991
12	John Paul II's Evangelium vitae	1995
104	U.K. Catholic Bishops' Conference, <i>The Common Good and Catholic Social Teaching</i>	1996

There are a number of points to be made here. First of all, the frequency of occurrences of "the common good" in the U.K. Bishops' document of 1996 indicates something of its importance for subsequent use of the term. The fact that the term occurs 104 times in this one document is indicative of the "push" the

term received in the 1990s. It gave the "common good" a new momentum in theological circles, and justifies the claim that the U.K. Catholic Bishops' document in particular "gave... many non-Catholics a phrase they had been looking for". Second, however, (and in line with McGann's own observations) frequency of use is not here contextualised with reference to the respective length or brevity of each individual document. Some are longer than others, sometimes quite considerably so. For some of the pre-1996 documents, the "common good" is not a major theme. Third, and perhaps most significantly, the majority of documents in McGann's table are *English translations* of encyclicals originally written in Latin. McGann's table therefore needs to come with something of a health warning. What exactly is being represented by the English phrase "common good" in these texts? Are they all instances of straightforward translation from Latin to English? Or are they sometimes instances of translation which accentuate use of the "common good" as a technical term, creating the sense that it is used with unequivocal precision? Has the process of rendering the texts into English done something to their meaning?

This last point becomes particularly acute when you start to think about what "the common good" means in the earliest documents in the list. There were, for example, no readily available English translations of *Rerum Novarum* until the Catholic Social Guild published one in 1909 (i.e., a full 18 years after the appearance of the Latin original). The simple but critical point is that although McGann counts 7 occurrences of "the common good" in *Rerum Novarum*, his count actually represents 7 occurrences of an English term found in a later translation. Problematically, the "common good" became more prominent in the text when it was cast in English words. Naturally, this raises some serious questions about what one is counting when counting "the common good" in core texts of Catholic Social Teaching. Of course, one should not deny the significance of phrases such as "communi bono" and "communibus boni" in the original Latin text of *Rerum Novarum* for the later tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. Nevertheless, one may observe that "the common good" is less prominent in the Latin original than the English translations suggest. The common good is less prominent in the Latin original than the English as "common good", and no Latin phrase equates directly, with the same technical

precision and regularity of use, to that which subsequently became attached to the "common good" when it appeared in the later translations and in subsequent Catholic Social Teaching.

Given that McGann's table raises as many problems as it solves when investigating the origins of "common good" language in modern Catholic Social Teaching, why have I made reference to his work? The essential point is that it allows me to locate the Latin texts within an English context in which "the common good" was *already current*. My contention is that attention to this English reception-context may help one understand how the "common good" was able to take hold as an idiom of Catholic language: it was a term which was already alive in English philosophy and theology, already loaded with a wealth of technical meaning and association, and easily recognisable to a particular section of the educated Anglophone audience. And this was primarily because of the influence of the Idealist philosopher Thomas Hill Green.

The importance of T. H. Green (1836-1882) to this context is easy to describe. In his *Lectures* on the Principles of Political Obligation (published posthumously in 1886, but originally delivered in 1879-1880), Green had used the exact English phrase "common good" no less than 78 times. On average, that amounts to once every 2.8 pages in the published editions of the work, with the greatest frequency concentrated in the discussion in Section G, "Will, not Force, is the Basis of the State". I am not here counting closely related phrases such as "good in common with others", "good for self and others", "common wellbeing", "social good", "public good", "higher good", "final good", "good conceived as common" or even "good as common". All of these variations on the theme also appear in the work, but none of them so consistently, and frequently, as the precise phrase, "common good". Green also wrote extensively on the common good in his *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883). Two chapters of this book (II.3 and II.4) are explicitly concerned with the theme. My contention is that Green's work was the primary "language event" which originated technical use of the phrase "common good" in English philosophy. Such, at least, was recognised by some of Green's students. In 1902, David George Ritchie drew attention to the "conspicuous" recurrence of the phrase "common good" in Green's political writings. xiv And in 1908 John Henry Muirhead recalled that "Green liked to call it... a Common Good". xv This suggests that both Ritchie and Muirhead believed that the "common good" was peculiarly and distinctively Green's language. It was a term then primarily associated with his work, and this, it seems, was the fertile ground into which Catholic Social Teaching was to plant itself.

Following Green a number of philosophers, social theorists, and theologians adopted his language of the common good. In 1892 J. H. Muirhead devoted a chapter of his University Extension Lectures on The Elements of Ethics to a discussion of "The End as Common Good". xvi In 1899, Bernard Bosanquet used the phrase "common good" 45 times in his Philosophical Theory of the State. xvii In 1906, Ernest Barker's The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle referred to Green's Principles of Political Obligation 8 times, the "common good" 17 times, and proceeded to draw the conclusion that Plato and Aristotle found their fulfilment in Hegel. In 1920, Henry Jones used the phrase 26 times in The Principles of Citizenship. xviii And in 1922 Leonard Trelawney Hobhouse used the phrase "common good" 75 times in his book, *The Elements of Social Justice*. xix Green himself was no orthodox Anglican; but he was religious. Indeed, he has been described as providing one of the "best purely philosophical [cases] for a religious view of the world". xx His influence extended into the Anglicanism of the day, particularly so through his favourite student at Balliol, Henry Scott Holland. xxi In a sermon preached in St Paul's Cathedral on 27th July, 1890, Holland proclaimed that "social laws" should be directed towards the "common good". xxii Later, in a volume of sermons published in 1906, Holland associated the "common good" with "public welfare". xxiii And in his Christian Social Union handbook, Our Neighbours, Holland argued that Christian ideal of "Fellowship" should be applied to the "welfare of the community". This, he said, would enable the essence of Christianity to be applied to "the common good". xxiv Holland, of course, was also a leading influence on Lux Mundi (1889) – another early source which makes use of the language of the "common good". J. H. Campion's essay on "Christianity and Politics" was resolutely clear that any government "which has for its aim anything else than the common good is, properly speaking, not a government at all".xxv Campion also argued that "Democracy is best adapted to a grave and temperate people, public-spirited and willing to make sacrifices for the common good".xxvi What is interesting here is the idea that the democratic system should itself be viewed as an expression of the common good: voter participation implies a willingness to accept the legitimacy of the outcomes of democratic contests even if one is on the losing side - "for the common good". Of course, this democratic version of the common good reflects Green's lectures of 1879-1880. And yet Campion also supported his use of the phrase "common good" with reference to Leo XIII's *Immortale Dei* of 1885 (an encyclical which itself displayed little patience for the democratic developments of the later nineteenth century). "Common good", at least, is Campion's English translation of words from the Latin text for the Anglican readers of *Lux Mundi*. A seemingly non-technical phrase from the encyclical is represented using the formally recognised technical terminology of Green's earlier lectures. The "common good" of modern Catholic Social Teaching is here cast in English terminology already pre-defined by Oxford Idealism.

And it should be acknowledged that leading Anglicans such as Scott Holland and Charles Gore had a very close relationship with some of the philosophical and social theorists mentioned above. Witness, for instance, the collection of essays *Property: Its Duties and Rights* (1913). Contributors included Gore himself, Holland, the Idealists A. D. Lindsay, H. G. Wood, and Hastings Rashdall, plus Hobhouse. Between them the writers used the phrase "common good" 10 times over, in addition to frequent reference to the "general good" and "public good".

The Idealist phase of Anglican theology endured for a generation and reached its pinnacle with William Temple. From as early as *The Nature of Personality* (1911), Temple was arguing that a properly educated, self-regulated, self-determining rational agent ought to will the "common purpose" or "common good" for the whole community. "xxviii Temple actually uses "common good" relatively infrequently. Likely reflecting on Aristotle's "*koinêi sumpheron*", he seems to have preferred "common purpose". Thus although the "common good" occurs only once in *The Nature of Personality*, "common purpose" is used 9 times. In *Mens Creatrix* (1917), the "common good" occurs once, and "common purpose" 15 times. On the other hand, in his Scott Holland Memorial Lectures, *Christianity and the State* (1928) – a text rightly identified as including Temple's first use of "welfare-state" – the "common good" occurs 4 times and the "common purpose" not at all. One can also find Temple using "common good" occurs 4 times and the "common purpose" not at all. One can also find Temple using "common good" in *Personal Religion and the Life of Fellowship* (1926), *Essays in Christian Politics* (1927), *Thoughts on Some Problems of the Day* (1931), *Nature, Man and God* (1934), *The Hope of a New World* (1942), and *Christianity and Social Order* (1942).

What are we to make of this? Quite clearly, there was an English philosophical tradition of the "common good" before the publication of *Rerum Novarum* (1891), and it was embraced by key Anglican theologians. In actual fact, it needs to be suggested that the "common good" language of Catholic Social Teaching rode piggy-back on these developments. This should be easy to grasp when the Catholic documents are viewed together with the Idealist ones. Let's re-work McGann's table, thus:

No. of "common good"	Document	Year
78	Green, Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation	Lectures of 1879- 1880, pub. 1886.
3	Leo XIII's Libertas	1888
6	Campion in Gore, ed., Lux Mundi	1889
7	Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum	1891
45	Bosanquet, Philosophical Theory of the State	1899
17	Barker, The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle	1906
7	English trans. of Rerum Novarum	1909
10	Gore, ed., Property: Its Duties and Rights	1913
3	U.S. Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction	1919
26	Henry Jones, The Principles of Citizenship	1920
75	Hobhouse, The Elements of Social Justice	1922
4	Temple, Christianity and the State	1928
16	Pius XI's Quadragesimo anno	1931
129	Jacques Maritain, The Person and the Common Good	1947
20	John XXIII's Mater et magistra	1961

47	John XXIII's Pacem in terris	1963
28	Vatican II's Gaudium et spes	1965
34	U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference, <i>Economic Justice for All</i>	1986
104	U.K. Catholic Bishops' Conference, <i>The Common Good and Catholic Social Teaching</i>	1996

Here, a number of later Catholic documents from McGann's table have been deleted for convenience. Again, the same caution needs to be exercised here: not all documents are in English, and not all documents are of the same length. The table is by no means exhaustive, and simply represents my attempt to provide a sensible corrective to McGann. But it does suggest that there may be little unique or unusual about the use of the phrase "common good" in Catholic documents up to the Second War. In any case, as Anna Rowlands has explained, these Catholic documents "offered no real explanation of what they assumed this term to mean" until John XXIII's *Mater et magistra* (1961). Example 2 By this stage, Jacques Maritain had begun to revive technical interest in the "common good" in Catholic philosophy. Two key texts, *Pour le Bien Commun* (1934), and *The Person and the Common Good* (1947), provided spurs for more focussed Catholic interest in the theme, and I have accordingly included the latter (from the English) in the table to illustrate the point. My suggestion is that Green and Maritain are the real architects of modern forms of the common good.

Of course, this begs a number of questions about the modern history of the "common good". Not least of these is whether we are here dealing with two separate yet broadly contemporaneous traditions of the common good, or two overlapping, non-competitive, confluent or complementary forms of the common good. Thinkers such as Green and Bosanquet on the one hand, and Maritain on the other, are clearly developing different lines of thought. Yet they do bear comparison. Admittedly, simply counting words does not tell you what the words mean in context. But I think it safe to say that Anglicans have had quite a lot to say about the common good – and did so is advance of the more recent development of the tradition within Catholic Social Teaching.

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Good and the Open Society" in The Review of Politics, 55.4 (1993), 687-712, here citing 694). The body politic was at one with the ecclesiastical body, the same seeking the civic as well as the religious common good.

¹ In the works of Plato, the "common good" (koinon agathon) appears only once – at Charmides 166d (it being for the "common good" that truth should be discovered). For discussion, see Alan Pichanick, "The Koinon Agathon of Plato's Charmides" in Areté Revista de Filosofia, vol. 34, extraordinary no., 2022, 45-57. in contrast to Plato, Aristotle provided a more expansive and apparently systematic reflection on the koinon agathon. This is arguably because Aristotle sought a non-hypostasised substitute for the Platonic Form of the Good (any good which is common to all is a universal good, independent of any accompanying transcendent Idea). Such, at least, is the argument of the Magna Moralia I 1, 1182b10-15. (On this, see See John M. Cooper, Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 203f.). At the same time, Aristotle also uses the phrase koinon agathon to indicate a shared good which unites people. Children, for instance, are said to be the common good of both parents, insofar as they hold both partners together through a shared interest (Nicomachean Ethics VIII 12 1162a29). In addition to the strictly literal and exact translation of koinon agathon as "common good", scholars sensibly allow another Aristotelian term, koinêi sumpheron, or "common, mutual advantage", to also be translated as "common good". The argument is that Aristotle uses this second term interchangeably with koinon agathon. (On this, see Donald Morrison, "The Common Good" in M. Deslauriers and P. Destrée, eds. The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 176-198). We find koinêi sumpheron in, for example, Aristotle's argument that since justice may be defined as being of common advantage, lawgivers should aim at fostering the good of the community (Nicomachean Ethics VIII 12, 1160a), as well as in his important statement that the true goal of any political constitution should be the common benefit of living well (Politics III 6, 1278b). As sumpheron is a more specialised, teleological, word for "good", meaning "good for something", such "common advantage" may be translated "common cause" or "common purpose". This equivalence of terms in Aristotle's Greek extends into later Latin writers. Thus the "common good" occasionally stands as the English translation for the common advantage (utilitatis communione sociatus), discussed by Cicero in Republic, 1, 25, 39. There are, of course, other relevant classical sources that could be brought into this discussion. Special mention should probably be made to Augustine's definition of "people" and "commonwealth": "A people is an association of a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of their love" (City of God, XIX, 24).

iii Given the importance of both Aristotle and Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, it is unsurprising that the latter's work includes an impressive breath of reference to the common good (or common end). Among others, examples of the common good/end include God (SCG III, 17. 6), happiness (SCG III, 39, 4), the order of the universe (In XII Meta., lect. 12), money (In V Ethic., lect. 4, n. 927), justice (ST I-II, 19, 10), and children (In VIII Ethic. Lect. 12, n. 1724). (On this, see Gregory Froelich, "The Equivocal Status of Bonum Commune" in The New Scholasticism, LXIII (Winter, 1989), 38-57; Michael A. Smith, "Common Advantage and Common Good" in Laval théologique et philosophique, vol. 51 (1), 1995, 111-125). Despite this range of reference, it is important to question exactly how Thomas made use of the term "bonum commune". Anna Rowlands has recently observed that the "common good" was "neither a central nor a systematic idea" in his thought. (See Anna Rowlands, Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 135). One has to wait for a work published by one of Thomas' Dominican followers, Remigio de' Girolami, to find a systematically developed account of the common good: his Tractatus de bono communi was published in Florence in 1302. This work shows that a social conception of the common good was being developed in the medieval period. It persisted, and continued to develop, as we enter the early modern period. iv The earliest English use of the precise words "common good" is likely Richard Hooker's in The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. The very title of the book betrays Hooker's debts to Aristotle. Indeed, according to Louis Dupré, "Hooker... synthesized Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology even more intrinsically than Aguinas himself had done". This was because the "religious situation of England dispenses him from having to make the distinctions between the ecclesiastical and the political community" (Louis Dupré, "The Common

Following Aristotle, Hooker argued that societies were "instituted" for the "common good": "a politic body... [is] animated, held together, and set on work in such actions as the common good requireth" (1.10). This section of Hooker's *Laws* evidently impressed itself on John Locke. In *The Second Treatise of Government* Locke cites Hooker's argument that "the Cause of Mens uniting themselves, at first in Politick Societies" is the natural inclination to "seek Communion and Fellowship with others" (II, 1, 15). A number of political philosophers provided variations on the general theme.

- Vitness, for example, Rousseau's remark that the end of the State is "le bien commun" (*The Social Contract,* II, I).
- vi Justin Welby, *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope*, second edition (London: Bloomsbury: 2021), 40-45 vii Malcolm Brown, "The Church of England and the Common Good" in Nicholas Sagovsky and Peter McGrail, eds, *Together for the Common Good: Towards a National Conversation* London: SCM Press, 2015), 120-136, here citing 120.
- https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/leading-thinkers/an-anglican-understanding-of-the-commongood (accessed 08/06/2022)
- ^{ix} Anna Rowlands, "Fraternal Traditions: Anglican Social Theology and Catholic Social Teaching in a British Context" in Malcolm Brown, ed. *Anglican Social Theology* (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), 133-174, here citing 134.
- ^x Dennis P. McGann, "The Common Good in Catholic Social Teaching: A Case Study in Modernization" in D. P. McGann and P. D. Miller, eds, *In Search of the Common Good* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 121-146, here referring to 123.
- xi Peter McGrail and Nicholas Sagovsky, 'Introduction' in *Together for the Common Good* (ibid.), p. xxiv.
- xii Jay P. Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 86.
- xiii The Latin text, together with English, Spanish, French, Hungarian, Italian, and Portuguese translations, is available at https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/la/encyclicals/documents/hf I-xiii enc 15051891 rerumnovarum.html (accessed 03/08/2022).
- xivD. G. Ritchie, The Principles of State Interference (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902), 141.
- xv J. H. Muirhead, *The Service of the State: Four Lectures on the Political Teaching of T. H. Green* (London: John Murray, 1908), 54.
- xvi J. H. Muirhead, *The Elements of Ethics* (London: John Murray, 1892), 151-169.
- xvii B. Bosanquet, *Philosophical Theory of the State* (London: Macmillan, 1899).
- xviii H. Jones, The Principles of Citizenship (London: Macmillan, 1920).
- xix L. T. Hobhouse, The Elements of Social Justice (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1922).
- xx T. L. S. Sprigge, *The God of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 225.
- xxi See G. W. E. Russell, *Prime Ministers and Some Others* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1918), 93; S. Paget, *Henry Scott Holland: Memoir and Letters* (London: John Murray, 1912), 23-53.
- xxii H. S. Holland, Sermons (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892), 171.
- xxiii H. S. Holland, Vital Values (London: Wells, Gardner, Darton and co., 1906), 145.
- xxiv H. S. Holland, Our Neighbours (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1911), 55-57.
- xxv C. Gore, ed., Lux Mundi, first edition (London: John Murray, 1889), 449.
- xxvi Ibid., 441.
- xxvii See T. H. Green, Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation, § 122.
- xxviii W. Temple, The Nature of Personality (London: Macmillan, 1911), 31.
- ***ix For references, see https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/leading-thinkers/the-common-good-the-metaphysics-of-citizenship (accessed 19/08/2022).
- xxx Rowlands, Towards a Politics of Communion, 152.
- See William Sweet, "L'individu et les droits de la personne selon Maritain et Bosanquet," in E*tudes maritainiennes / Maritain Studies*, Vol. VI (1990), 141-166.