

NJPN Comment in the Catholic Universe - Niall Cooper

Transformation: a task for us all

Our vision is that the UK can and must be transformed into a country where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. In the midst of a global pandemic, we might feel further from this goal than ever, but our Christian faith drives us to believe that another world is possible.

What is clear is that this vision will not happen without the determined efforts of a broad social movement, in which the Church has a central role to play. For Church Action on Poverty, such a movement has to be rooted in the principles of dignity, agency, and power.

Pope Francis' recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, in the words of Maria Power, "offers a new vision of society in which human dignity and the human rights of all are respected...He has always wanted to make it clear that his papacy is one of action - placing the needs of the poorest, most marginalised and disenfranchised at the centre of his ministry."

But being human also brings with it the capacity for creativity and change. One of the worst things about living in poverty in the UK is the way in which people are assumed to be helpless, hapless, and lacking in any agency of their own. In my experience, many people with the best ideas for how to tackle poverty are those who live with it and struggle against it on a daily basis. Our task is therefore to recognise and affirm the wisdom, insights and agency of people struggling against poverty themselves, and to align ourselves with their struggles.

The task of transforming society can only be achieved by speaking truth to power. As Martin Luther King once said, power is simply "the ability to achieve a purpose... It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change." To bring about true change, we must seek to build power with people in poverty, and to challenge institutions which exercise power in unjust ways.

So do our efforts to tackle poverty affirm the dignity, agency, and power of the people we encounter? This is not some abstract question, but a practical task for all of us to engage in with others, where we are, as we seek to build a movement for change together. I invite you to join us in this task.

Resources for prayer and worship on Church Action on Poverty Sunday (21 February) at: www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday

Niall Cooper is Director of Church Action on Poverty.