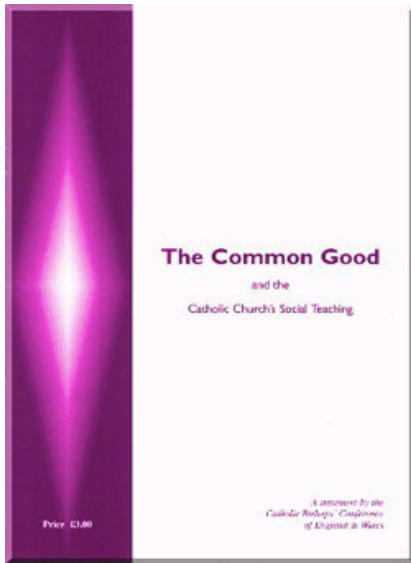


# THE COMMON GOOD AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING

A statement by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales  
1996



Preface by Cardinal Basil Hume  
Introduction and Guide to *The Common Good*

Part 1: Christian Citizens in Modern Britain  
Part 2: Application to Contemporary Questions

Appendix I: Extracts from Catholic Social Teaching  
Appendix II: Catholic Resources

Introducing *The Common Good*

## **Preface by Cardinal Basil Hume, Archbishop of Westminster**

It is the task of bishops of the Church to preach and teach the Gospel; to point people in the direction of Christ. Religion is always personal, but never just a private affair. Discipleship involves seeking God in this world, as well as preparing to meet Him in the next. The Gospel imperative to love our neighbour entails not only that we should help those in need, but also address the causes of destitution and poverty. The deepening of the spiritual life must go hand in hand with practical concern for our neighbour, and thus with social action.

Many Catholics and indeed others too may well be surprised to discover how over the centuries the Catholic Church has reflected on the social dimension of the Gospel; that is, the way society helps or hinders people to live out the command to love God and our neighbour. In recent times the Church's social teaching has been emphasised and further developed by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II.

The Church in each country, under the pastoral guidance of the local bishops, has a continuing duty to apply the values of the Gospel to the problems of society, and so help all members of the church, lay, religious and ordained, to play an active part in striving to build a just and compassionate social order. Over the past year the bishops of England and Wales have been considering some of these issues with a view to presenting them to the Catholic community as a fundamental part of the teaching of the Church. This document, *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching* is the result. Below is a brief elaboration of some of its themes.

The foundation of this teaching is the dignity of the human person. In virtue simply of our shared humanity, we must surely respect and honour one another. Each individual has a value that can never be lost and must never be ignored. Moreover, each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. Society must therefore first of all respect and protect human life itself - at all its stages from conception to its natural end. This is the bedrock of our civilisation, and it is why abortion virtually on demand is one of the greatest scandals of our time.

Our human dignity also consists in our being made free by God; free, that is, to do His will by choosing to live and act within the framework of His law. Society should therefore respect human freedom by enabling men and women to assume responsibility for their own lives, and encouraging them to co-operate with each other to pursue the common good. This means that the functions of government, though important, must always be subsidiary; that is, government should help men and women to be free to realise their own destiny.

The Church has the right and the duty to advocate a social order in which the human dignity of all is fostered, and to protest when it is in any way threatened. Thus the Church opposes totalitarianism because it oppresses people and deprives them of their freedom. While recognising the importance of wealth creation, the Church denounces any abuses of economic power such as those which deprive employees of what is needed for a decent standard of living.

The Church also rejects the view that human happiness consists only in material well-being, and that achieving this alone is the goal of any government. If a government pays too much attention to material welfare at the expense of other values, it may advocate policies which reduce people to a passive state of dependency on welfare. Equally, if a government gives too little priority to tackling poverty, ill-health, poor housing and other social ills, the human dignity of those who suffer these afflictions is denied. In every society respect for human dignity requires that, so far as possible, basic human needs are

met. The systematic denial of compassion by individuals or public authorities can never be a morally justified political option.

The Church does not present a political programme, still less a party political one. The social teaching of the Church, as expounded in this document, provides a set of consistent and complementary principles, values and goals. We recognise, of course, that many people of other faiths or even none would be able to accept much that this teaching has to offer, whether it is described as Catholic or not. Every public policy should be judged by the effect it has on human dignity and the common good. We accept that in many cases there will often be much scope for debate about the best way to achieve these.

The Church's social teaching places the political within the larger context of humanity's relationship with God. Social and political action is important, but realising our full human dignity as children of God, made in his image and likeness, also requires each of us to undertake an inner spiritual journey. The future of humanity does not depend on political reform, social revolution or scientific advance. Something else is needed. It starts with a true conversion of mind and heart.

**Cardinal Basil Hume**

*Archbishop of Westminster*

President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

## **Introduction and Guide to this Document**

Can managers treat employees any way they like? Is the law of the jungle the right one for human beings? Is there really "no such thing as society"? Does the secret of success in life have to be "each for himself and the devil take the hindmost"?

Such questions worry almost everybody. The whole world sometimes seems to be getting less and less user-friendly. Even politicians cannot offer us much comfort. Talking about the moral rules at the basis of society has never been more difficult, nor more necessary.

But it is not impossible. There exists a set of ideas that tries to answer questions like these. They are based on firm Christian principles. But they are just as likely to appeal to people with no belief. They come from the Roman Catholic Church, which is why we call them Catholic Social Teaching. But they are not about imposing Catholicism on other people. Indeed, these very principles forbid such an approach.

This document has been prepared by a working party set up by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The text has been agreed by the bishops, and is published in their name. It explains the Church's social teaching in general, and then goes on to apply it to present-day British society.

Catholic Social Teaching is something all Catholics ought to know about. In the first instance, therefore, this document is aimed at them. Catholic parishes and Catholic schools are being urged to spread the word by whatever means they can.

It is not a list of Dos and Don'ts for politicians. It is not a blueprint for a perfect society. It is more like a set of signposts, suggesting the way forward, or a set of questions, by which we can examine the way we live.

Anyone who studies the document will quickly see that these ideas are not solely Catholic property. Their aim is to bring about a good and fair society, for the benefit of everyone. Most people feel that society ought to be organised in such a way as to improve the lot of all its members. They will find much to agree with in this document. Anybody who doesn't feel that way, won't.

This is what social teaching calls the idea of "the common good". It is an expression that appears time and again in this document. Like many ideas in Catholic Social Teaching, it is something that many British people will find familiar but may not have had a name for, before. Once you name a thing, you start to get a grip on it.

These are issues about which many people feel strongly. If they misunderstand what is intended, they might resent an intervention by the Catholic bishops or any other religious body. People do not want to be told how to vote. That is not what this document does.

We have taken great care to set out clearly the terms under which we are working, including the limits to our role. We do not want avoidable misunderstandings. For instance, we are not involved in party politics.

In the first part of the document, we explain what kind of thing Catholic Social Teaching is.

Popes have taken the lead in expounding Catholic Social Teaching. As we explain, many of the key documents are papal documents, called encyclical letters. As social conditions have developed over the last century, so the application of these ideas has developed too.

In our **Appendix I** there is an extensive selection of quotations from the official documents of Catholic Social Teaching over more than a century. The selection is not meant to be a comprehensive account of the teaching, but enough to offer a flavour of it. These extracts reinforce the teaching that members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales are putting forward here.

The present Pope's last encyclical in this series was in 1991. In it he talked about the benefits and limits of a market economy. He was well aware of Thatcherism and Reaganomics, and of the criticisms of those systems. He was thoroughly familiar, too, with the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe.

Pope John Paul II is often credited with playing a major part in that collapse. He attributed this influence partly to the way he had promoted Catholic Social Teaching in the final years of Communist rule, most of all in his native Poland. There and elsewhere in Eastern Europe - as in many parts of Western Europe after the war - it seemed to offer people a way out of an impasse. It still does today.

In the opening paragraphs, (Part I, 1 to 6), we state that we want to be open in our approach. We are eager to listen to ideas from other churches and indeed anyone who wants to contribute, Catholics or others.

We go on to show many ways in which the Catholic Church is already contributing to the good of society (7 to 11) and **Appendix II**, (page 34). This gives it considerable experience of conditions in Britain. In particular it is a major player in welfare and education. It has earned a voice.

The poor, whether Catholic or not, have always had a special place in the Church's concerns. The document takes up the story of why this is so. It stresses that all Christians, individually and collectively, have a duty to take seriously what is called the "option for the poor" (12 to 15).

In the following paragraphs, (16 to 23) we argue on the basis of Christian theology that "what it means to be human" includes being a social animal, with social responsibilities.

Then we look at the different kinds of community, from the individual family (the most important community of all) to the national and international level.

In so doing we briefly introduce two more basic ideas from Catholic Social Teaching, subsidiarity and solidarity. They are closely linked. Subsidiarity means decisions being taken as close to the grass roots as good government allows. Solidarity means we are all responsible for each other.

Where does Catholic Social teaching come from? In paragraphs 24 to 32 we recall how the industrial revolution of the 19th century had caused deep divisions in society between rich and poor.

Communist revolution threatened. The Church felt an urgent duty to respond. It drew on its ancient wisdom, including the Bible and the writings of learned saints and scholars of the Church's history. And it spoke out on behalf of the poor and defenceless, especially exploited workers. The Church attacked economic determinism, whether on the left in the form of Marxism, or on the right in the doctrine of the unlimited free market, or laissez-faire economics.

In modern times, the document explains, the Church has updated its teaching as conditions have changed. It has become global in its scope. But poverty and stark inequality remain. The task is nowhere complete.

Next (33 to 38) we deal with democracy. We are concerned about its limitations. Human rights, which have now been incorporated into Catholic thinking on social questions, are also not plain sailing. The document explains how both democracy and human rights are necessary for the common good. But neither of them can be taken for granted.

These lead us (39 to 40) to a brief reflection on the relationship between the preaching of the Gospel and political activity. Putting right injustice may sometimes be a form of evangelisation. There is no hard dividing line between politics and religion. Nor (paragraphs 41 to 43) is Catholic Social Teaching less important than other branches of the Church's moral teaching.

It is not by chance that many aspects of the Church's teaching appeal to the intuition people have about what is right and wrong in society. We believe this is because the teaching has been shaped by "natural law" (44 to 47).

In paragraphs 48 to 50, the document takes up Pope John Paul II's own redefinition of the Church's social teaching. The common good appears again, in a new form. In the light of this the document begins to set the scene for some applications of that teaching. The defeat of Marxism in Eastern Europe was a significant moment. Is Catholic Social Teaching an "idea whose time has come"?

Next, our document (51 to 53) gives a fuller account of the two ideas introduced earlier, subsidiarity and solidarity. The common good cannot exist without them, nor without human rights and the option for the poor.

These ideas are the basic building blocks of Catholic Social Teaching. Leave out any one of them and the balance is upset. The result is no longer recognisable.

But they still have to be applied. This can be a controversial process.

It is much easier to grasp the essential ideas of Catholic Social Teaching when there are concrete examples before us. Then the ideas take on a vitality and strength that can be missing in the abstract.

As at the end of the 19th century, Catholic Social Teaching is concerned to protect the poor and vulnerable from the chill winds of economic forces. The defeat of Communism should not mean the triumph of unbridled capitalism.

In the following paragraphs (Part II, 54 onwards) we apply these ideas to some of the major questions in contemporary British society. Although our document is produced in the light of the coming general election, the teaching in it is meant to endure beyond that.

***The declining status of politicians (57 to 61).***

We believe the regard in which politicians are held is unjustified. But we think some politicians have contributed to this by their own behaviour.

***What to look for in a candidate (62 to 65).***

Character is often as important as a candidate's policy on a particular issue. A general election is not the same as a single issue referendum.

***The "right to life" issues and medical ethics (66 to 68).***

As a result of the casual approach to abortion, respect for human life is being lost and fundamental moral principles are being undermined.

***The common good and the plight of the poor (69 to 75).***

Severe inequality leaves those at the bottom excluded from the community; it is not enough to hope that wealth will "trickle down".

***What is the morality of the market place? (76 to 80).***

Pros and cons of market forces. They can drive wealth creation, but they are not infallible.

***Free markets, the poor and the common good (81 to 85).***

A market system needs a supervision and regulation, otherwise the poor and vulnerable can be squeezed out.

***Public taste at risk in the mass media (86 to 89).***

Broadcasting and newspapers are a test case for market forces. How much has competition served the common good?

***Labour markets, wages and trade unions (90 to 98).***

A worker has rights, and should not be treated merely as a commodity to be bought and sold at the lowest possible price. Unions must respect the common good.

***Europe (99 to 101).***

Solidarity as well as subsidiarity should shape Britain's relations with the rest of Europe.

***Rich and poor nations and the debt crisis (102 to 105).***

Third World nations with overwhelming debt need a way out, otherwise poverty will increase. Overseas aid remains a vital commitment.

***The environment is a sacred trust (106 to 108).***

Each generation must pass on what it has received in good order to the next.

***Expanding ownership of wealth and property (109 to 112).***

The right to own property is a basic human freedom but it may be curtailed in the name of the common good. Companies have social responsibilities.

In conclusion, we say what we think are the real challenges to British society at the end of the 20th century. We suggest how a sense of vision and purpose might be restored to the national consciousness. We are convinced Catholic Social Teaching has something very important to offer (113 to 120).

Rt Rev David Konstant  
Bishop of Leeds  
Chairman of the Working Party, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales  
October 1996

## **Part 1: Christian Citizens in Modern Britain**

1) As bishops of the Catholic Church we have a duty to proclaim the Christian Gospel and to set out its implications for human society. An understanding of these implications can help members of the Church make more informed and reasoned political choices.

2) The inseparable links between the spiritual, moral and political aspects of society are complex and profound. Leaders of the Church have to be careful not to step outside the limits of their own competence nor to infringe the proper autonomy of lay people. It is not for bishops to tell people how to vote. Bishops, clergy and lay people need to work together, each partner respecting the appropriate competence and experience of others.

3) As Catholics we are not without resources in trying to meet the need for moral guidance in the social and political sphere. There is an abundance of wisdom in Scripture, in the teachings of the early Fathers of the Church and the writings of numerous Christian thinkers down the ages. Furthermore, we have at our disposal the corpus of official doctrine known as Catholic Social Teaching. Together with the relevant documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the statements of local and regional conferences of bishops, the "social encyclicals" of various popes since 1891 represent a formidable body of insight and guidance. For Catholics it carries special authority. But it is available to all people of whatever religious persuasion, as they engage in the democratic process in their own societies.

4) The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is convinced that the social teaching of the Church is more relevant than it has ever been to the complex problems faced by advanced Western countries such as modern Britain. We welcome discussion and collaboration in the application and development of this teaching, and would not want to exclude from dialogue anyone who has expertise or responsibility in the political field, whether Catholic or not. There will be some who find a particular expression of this teaching unsatisfactory, or who wish to bring to attention considerations which may have been neglected in the past. Their contribution is also important.

5) We have great respect for other traditions of Christian social teaching in Britain, such as those exemplified by Wesley, Elizabeth Fry, Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, Kingsley, Booth, Temple, and many others. We have been appreciative of formal opportunities for dialogue in this area, which we wish to continue developing with the leaders and members of all Christian churches in England and Wales, especially those with expertise in political and social theory. We also wish to co-operate with other national and regional Catholic Bishops' Conferences in the future development of Catholic Social Teaching. We are especially grateful for the leadership shown by Pope John Paul II in this area. During his pontificate the Church's understanding of the moral principles upon which a healthy society should be based has been considerably deepened.

6) It is in this spirit of openness, and of listening as well as teaching, that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales looks ahead to the general election that is expected in the coming months. This document is issued with our authority as bishops, "teachers of the faith" of the Catholic Church, both as a contribution to the common good of our society and a contribution to the general development of Catholic teaching. As political feelings inevitably become more heated and partisan, we judge this to be an opportune moment to try to maintain or even seek to raise the level of public debate. A national political debate conducted at the level of soundbites and slogans would not serve the national interest.

### **The Church's presence**

7) The Catholic Church already has a deep involvement in the public life of Britain, with a great range of institutions directly or indirectly working under Catholic auspices for the betterment of individuals and society. It has a major stake in welfare and educational provision, equivalent to an investment of many millions of pounds, and the time and



energy of tens of thousands of dedicated people. The Church's presence in the country is seen first of all through the countless individuals who bring their Catholic vision to bear in their secular work.

8) In partnership with central government and local education authorities, the Catholic bishops have responsibility for approximately one in ten schools in the State sector, as well as for institutions engaged in the training of teachers. We also have oversight of numerous schools in the independent sector, and of various academic institutions engaged in undergraduate and postgraduate education. All those institutions draw their Catholic character from their attention to Catholic doctrine (including Catholic Social Teaching), their regular collective worship, and the moral and spiritual content of the ethos that underlies their daily life.

9) The Catholic Church is a significant employer of professional social workers and people in other related professions, as well as having numerous members of male and female religious orders engaged in these fields. There are also many thousands of Catholic volunteers working unpaid in various welfare organisations throughout the country. The range of work covered by these Catholic welfare institutions (in some places now in partnership with similar bodies from other Christian Churches, and in collaboration with secular agencies) stretches from prison chaplaincy and the "befriending" of young offenders to working with the mentally handicapped, from hospices to marriage guidance, from adoption and fostering to night shelters for the homeless and accommodation for refugees. The list is almost inexhaustible.

10) Much of this educational and social provision preceded what we now call the Welfare State, and expressed the Church's commitment to those experiencing any sort of hardship or suffering, especially the disadvantages caused by poverty, social exclusion or lack of education. The Catholic Church in these islands is no stranger to the desperately poor.

11) It is this long experience, probably equal to that of any other non-government organisation in Britain, that the Catholic Church in England and Wales draws upon in responding to contemporary social conditions. Indeed, it does not regard as separate from its own tradition the ecclesiastical and monastic institutions of pre-Reformation England and Wales, which made immeasurable contributions to the welfare of society and the relief of distress. The Catholic Church now sees itself as working alongside and often in alliance with other bodies, secular and religious, state and voluntary, on behalf of the common good. It brings to this task its own moral and spiritual priorities and vision, and it therefore approaches social problems in distinctive ways. We believe this distinctiveness can be of benefit to the whole community.

### **The dignity of the human person**

12) The Catholic social vision has as its focal point the human person, the clearest reflection of God among us. Scripture tells us that every human being is made in the image of God. God became flesh when he entered the human race in the person of Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Christ challenges us to see his presence in our neighbour, especially the neighbour who suffers or who lacks what is essential to human flourishing. In relieving our neighbour's suffering and meeting our neighbour's needs, we are also serving Christ. For the Christian, therefore, there can be no higher privilege and duty.

13) We believe each person possesses a basic dignity that comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment, not from race or gender, age or economic status. The test therefore of every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human dignity and indeed human life itself. Policies which treat people as only economic units, or policies which reduce people to a passive state of dependency on welfare, do not do justice to the dignity of the human person.

14) People who are poor and vulnerable have a special place in Catholic teaching: this is what is meant by the "preferential option for the poor". Scripture tells us we will be judged by our response to the "least of these", in which we see the suffering face of Christ himself. Humanity is one family despite differences of nationality or race. The poor are not a burden; they are our brothers and sisters. Christ taught us that our neighbourhood is universal: so loving our neighbour has global dimensions. It demands fair international trading policies, decent treatment of refugees, support for the UN and control of the arms trade. Solidarity with our neighbour is also about the promotion of equality of rights and equality of opportunities; hence we must oppose all forms of discrimination and racism.

15) It is time we reminded ourselves that in the spirit of good citizenship all members of the Catholic Church must accept their full share of responsibility for the welfare of society. We should regard the discharge of those responsibilities as no less important than fulfilling our religious duties and indeed as part of them. As bishops of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, however, we do not seek to engage in party politics in any form. We claim whatever rights and opportunities are available to us only in order to exercise an influence on behalf of whatever we believe to be true and good, especially in solidarity with people everywhere who are on low incomes, disabled, ill or infirm, homeless or poorly housed, in prison, refugees, or who are otherwise vulnerable, powerless and at a disadvantage.

### **The social dimension of faith**

16) Christians believe that God is the creator of all things, visible and invisible. Every corner of creation is sustained by God's creative will; the laws of nature, including the laws of human nature, are laws made by God. There is no part of creation, therefore, that cannot be examined with the eye of faith, the better to understand its relation to the rest and its ultimate purposes.

17) Nothing is beyond the scope of faith, even though faith must often join hands with secular disciplines in order to explore and understand the issues fully and accurately. This applies especially to human society, which is a special part of God's creative activity. The Church does not reject the findings of economics, sociology and anthropology, but welcomes them, in so far as they are true, as valuable aids to a deeper understanding of how society works.

18) An insight of Christian faith in the Trinity is the knowledge that the desire to belong to human society is God-given. Human beings are made in the image of God, and within the one God is a divine society of three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Communities are brought into being by the participation of individual men and women, responding to this divine impulse towards social relationships - essentially, the impulse to love and to be loved - which was implanted by the God who created them.

19) It is a distortion of human nature, therefore, to suppose that individuals can exist independently of society, as if it had no demand on them. Members of society are individually subject to moral principles in their own lives, and these implicit and explicit moral demands are not of their own invention. The same is true of societies. They too have demands and those demands are not arbitrary. There are ways of structuring society which are inimical to human progress and personal development. The Church calls them "structures of sin".

20) Pope John Paul II defined the concept of "structures of sin" in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) in the following terms: "If the present situation can be attributed to difficulties of various kinds, it is not out of place to speak of 'structures of sin' which... are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And thus they grow stronger, spread, and become the source of other sins, and

so influence people's behaviour. One cannot easily gain a profound understanding of the reality that confronts us unless we give a name to the root of the evils which afflict us" (paragraph 36.2).

21) There are other ways of structuring society which facilitate true human development and correspond to moral principles and demands. Such structures can enable people to realise their dignity and achieve their rights. The human race itself is a "community of communities", existing at international, national, regional and local level. The smallest such community is the individual family, the basic cell of human society. A well constructed society will be one that gives priority to the integrity, stability and health of family life. It should be a principle of good government, therefore, that no law should be passed with possible social consequences without first considering what effect it would have on family life and especially on children.

22) The principle behind the relationships between the different layers of this "community of communities" should be that of subsidiarity. In a centralised society, subsidiarity will mainly mean passing powers downwards; but it can also mean passing appropriate powers upwards, even to an international body, if that would better serve the common good and protect the rights of families and of individuals.

23) If subsidiarity is the principle behind the organisation of societies from a vertical perspective, solidarity is the equivalent horizontal principle. Solidarity means the willingness to see others as another "self", and so to regard injustice committed against another as no less serious than an injustice against oneself. Solidarity expresses the moral truth that "no man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main" (John Donne).

### **Origins of social teaching**

24) The tradition of Catholic Social Teaching represents a sustained attempt to understand how societies function and what principles should guide them. The fashioning of social teaching is a task the Church has undertaken down the ages. But it began afresh towards the end of the nineteenth century, when European nations had experienced the impact of industrialisation and the severe and rapid disruption it caused in hitherto relatively stable patterns of community.

25) The Church noted the conflict between the opposing theories of laissez-faire capitalism and Marxist Communism for governing the progress of industrial societies, and in the name of social justice found much to object to in each of them. Each regarded human society as being subject to inevitable economic laws, the consequences of which were sometimes very harsh.

26) The subordination of human well-being to economic principles, whether of left or right, was widely recognised in the Catholic Church as resulting from a distorted perception of reality. It was resistance to this economic determinism which prompted Pope Leo XIII to issue the encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. It became the first of a series of "social encyclicals", on the basis of which the Church set out to restore in contemporary industrial society the priority of the human over the economic, and the spiritual and moral over the material.

27) The general purpose of the Church's social teaching is to contribute to the formation of conscience as a basis for specific action. The Church's teaching authority is comprehensive in its scope, but limited in its immediate practical application. It is for individuals and groups to decide how best to apply it in particular circumstances. There will not always be agreement. Debate will often be necessary, controversy inevitable. There are some elements in this teaching, however, which are direct applications of the moral law and therefore strictly binding on consciences. Examples would be the Church's

condemnation of genocide or the deliberate encouragement of racial hatred. They are not debatable.

28) Social teaching is not limited to a collection of official, mainly papal, texts. It is an oral tradition as well as a written one, and it is a lived and living tradition. Many Catholics whose lives are dedicated to the service and welfare of others make this teaching present by their very activity, even if they have never read a social encyclical.

29) The writing of these encyclicals was not done in isolation, as if the Pope alone had exclusive access to knowledge about the just and proper ordering of society that was not available to anyone else. The encyclicals' insights into human nature and human community have arisen in response to current crises, often on the Church's own doorstep. It is noticeable, however, that in the course of the last hundred years the focus of attention of these documents has gradually extended from Western Europe to the whole globe. The theology behind them has also undergone a continuous evolution: the earlier encyclicals concentrated more on a natural law basis while those since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), including those by Pope John Paul II, have moved to a more Christ-centred and hence more person-centred approach.

30) The offices which support the Pope's work supply him with a continuous flow of reports and opinions from all parts of the Church, and several Vatican departments follow the development of ideas in these matters by all available means. The Holy See's worldwide diplomatic service has been given the duty to monitor, report on and, where possible, correct human rights abuses. The international oversight of the Holy See enables it to see how similar social problems can arise in different societies, and it can also see which solutions to such problems prove most successful in advancing the true interests of humanity.

31) From time to time controversies arise about some aspect of this teaching, and serious attention is given to the criticisms made at such times. As bishops, we hope to see more participation in the future development of Catholic Social Teaching, so that it is properly owned by all Catholics, especially those who have positions of influence in our society.

32) The development of Catholic teaching in the past has inevitably reflected particular historical circumstances, and this needs to be kept in mind in interpreting it today. At certain times it has even been wrongly invoked in support of oppressive regimes or governments perpetrating social injustice. One of the reasons for the progressive evolution of Catholic Social Teaching over the years has been the need to correct these misinterpretations.

### **Fundamental features of our society**

33) We wish to express our support and respect for the political institutions of this country, and our pride in the way these institutions have been admired all over the world. Britain has a mature political culture and democratic tradition. Many insights of British political and constitutional theory have evolved along lines parallel to Catholic Social Teaching, and the interaction of these two bodies of political wisdom is stimulating and enriching for both of them.

34) The Church's teaching now fully embraces two fundamental features of modern society about which it once had some difficulties: democracy and human rights. In the case of democracy, the Church has been able to make its own contribution to political theory by exploring the limitations of the democratic process, for instance by warning that democracy can never be a self-fulfilling justification for policies that are intrinsically immoral. Democracy is not a self-sufficient moral system. Democracy, if it is to be healthy, requires more than universal suffrage: it requires the presence of a system of common values.

35) If democracy is not to become a democratic tyranny in which the majority oppresses the minority, it is necessary for the public to have an understanding of the common good and the concepts that underlie it. Otherwise, they will be unlikely to support actions by public authority that are not to the immediate advantage of the majority. Furthermore, public confidence is undermined, and democracy subverted, when the members of public authorities responsible for the common good are not appointed democratically or on objective merit but in order to ensure that the authority in question has a political complexion favourable to the government of the day.

36) We repeat the warning the Church has given in the past, that human rights are sometimes advanced to support claims to individual autonomy which are morally inappropriate. Not everything said to be a "right" really is one. There is no "right to choose" to harm another, for instance. The proliferation of alleged "rights" can devalue the very concept. So can the amplification of rights without equivalent stress on duties, and without some concept of the common good to which all have an obligation to contribute. However, that reservation must not be allowed to destroy the value of the principle itself: that individuals have a claim on each other and on society for certain basic minimum conditions without which the value of human life is diminished or even negated. Those rights are inalienable, in that individuals and societies may not set them at naught: in Catholic terms those rights derive from the nature of the human person made in the image of God, and are therefore in no way dependent for their existence on recognition by the state by way of public legislation.

37) These rights are universal. The study of the evolution of the idea of human rights shows that they all flow from the one fundamental right: the right to life. From this derives the right to those conditions which make life more truly human: religious liberty, decent work, housing, health care, freedom of speech, education, and the right to raise and provide for a family. Catholic moral theology tells us that it is the destiny and duty of each human being to become more fully human. A society which observes human rights will be a society in which this true human growth is encouraged. Every member of the community has a duty to the common good in order that the rights of others can be satisfied and their freedoms respected. Those whose rights and freedoms are being denied should be helped to claim them. Indeed, human rights have come to represent that striving for freedom from tyranny and despotism for which the human spirit has always yearned.

38) We are aware that there are various proposals afoot to strengthen the protection of human rights in Great Britain, such as the framing of a Bill of Rights or the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into British domestic law. Some strengthening seems necessary, whatever the method chosen. This necessity is related to the need for a system of common values if our democratic society is indeed to be healthy.

39) Catholic Social Teaching sees an intimate relationship between social and political liberation on the one hand, and on the other, the salvation to which the Church calls us in the name of Jesus Christ. The spreading of that message of salvation is the task of evangelisation. Evangelisation means bringing the Good News of the Gospel into every stratum of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.

40) That must include liberating humanity from all forces and structures which oppress it, though political liberation cannot be an end in itself. Evangelisation always requires the transformation of an unjust social order; and one of its primary tasks is to oppose and denounce such injustices. All Catholics who engage in the political life of the nation are entitled to regard themselves as engaging in evangelisation, provided they do so in accordance with the principles of Catholic teaching. One of the most important steps in the evangelisation of the social order is the freeing of individuals from the inertia and

passivity that comes from oppression, hopelessness or cynicism, so that they discover how they can exert greater control over their own destinies and contribute to the well-being of others. This has particular relevance today.

### **Not an optional teaching**

41) All Catholic citizens need an informed "social conscience" that will enable them to identify and resist structures of injustice in their own society. This will especially be the case at the time of heightened political activity, for instance when as now a general election is in prospect. Attention to Catholic Social Teaching, both its general principles and its application in specific circumstances, will enable the traditional Catholic custom of "examination of conscience" to be extended into the social and political realm, an extension which we would strongly encourage.

42) All who preach and teach in the Church must as far as possible avoid giving the impression that observance of this teaching is optional for Catholics, or somehow less important than other aspects of the Church's moral guidance. Certainly, disregard for social teaching in some serious aspect would be an occasion for repentance, penance and, if necessary, appropriate restitution. It is not the fear of sin and its punishment, however, but the love of God and of one's neighbour which should inspire Catholics to follow this teaching.

43) The current tendency in social teaching, under the influence of the Second Vatican Council and the present Pope, is to integrate it with the rest of the Church's moral teaching. The Council included as evils which it described as "infamies indeed" such practices as "subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery... disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than as free and responsible persons" in exactly the same list as "murder, genocide, abortion and euthanasia". Similarly, Pope John Paul II has placed the issue of abortion within the context of social injustice, especially the poor economic circumstances of many women and their families. This makes it clearer that situations of personal sin are often related to situations of structural sin.

### **Natural law**

44) One of the primary sources of Catholic Social Teaching is natural law. Knowledge of natural law is possible by the use of human reason, even without faith, and this is therefore a source of moral guidance which is open to everyone. Catholics and non-Catholics can make common cause in response to the insights of natural law. Indeed, in defending and upholding human rights (which are an expression of natural law) Catholics and others all over the world have discovered how much they have in common. The Catholic Church believes that its insight into natural law, contained in its tradition of social teaching, is one of the contributions it can make to the rest of the community, for the welfare of all.

45) Natural law is closely related to natural justice: a set of principles by which people deserve to be treated when, rightly or wrongly, they are confronted by public authority and made to answer for some act or omission. We would regard the Common Law principles of natural justice as appropriate to be incorporated into the Catholic Social Teaching tradition. Common Law emerged in the Middle Ages in England as an expression of the existing social consensus of the difference between right and wrong. It was strongly influenced both by natural law and by the jurisdiction of the church courts before the Reformation.

46) Natural law also has a close relationship to Revelation. The moral teachings of the Ten Commandments themselves, revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, were already present implicitly in the hearts and minds of the Israelites, by virtue of natural law. The teachings of natural law can also be found implicitly present in the moral teachings of other great world faiths.

47) The Church frequently uses natural law and Biblical sources alongside each other, for mutual elucidation. Nevertheless the interpretation and application of natural law is rarely straightforward and often controversial. It is easier to say that natural law points to the need for a harmonious and balanced order than to say in any particular case exactly where that balance is to be found. That becomes a matter for political judgement, though it will be a better political judgement if it is made in the light of first principles. On the other hand, to ignore natural law, for instance by organising society so that in effect it serves the interests of a few rather than the common good, is to collaborate with the structures of sin.

### **The development of Catholic Social Teaching**

48) The present Pope has contributed to the development of Catholic Social Teaching as much as any of his predecessors. He has defined the religious heart of this teaching as "the need for conversion to one's neighbour, at the level of community as well as of the individual." This conversion affects attitudes which determine each person's relationship with neighbours, human communities, and "with nature itself": the ordered mutually connected system, including animals, which makes up the natural world. All of these elements are involved in the common good. That common good is the whole network of social conditions which enable human individuals and groups to flourish and live a fully, genuinely human life, otherwise described as "integral human development". All are responsible for all, collectively, at the level of society or nation, not only as individuals.

49) At the same time as the Pope has expanded the general horizons of the Church's social teaching, regional and local conferences of bishops have begun to issue their own commentaries on social issues of current concern to their communities. The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has decided that the time is right to respond to a growing interest in Catholic Social Teaching in our countries.

50) The ascendancy of market-based economic models over collective or command economic models has increased the importance of Catholic Social Teaching in the modern day, especially because its own critical analysis of free-market capitalism has in no way been discredited. The Catholic Church has a long history of resistance to Marxist Communism, both as an ideology and as a power structure. But it recognises that the very existence of this ideological opposition to capitalism, however flawed, tended in the past to act as a balancing factor or crude brake on some of the excesses of which capitalism is capable. In the light of such considerations as these, it is more necessary than ever to explain, promote and apply the Church's social teaching in the communities for which we share responsibility.

### **Subsidiarity and solidarity**

51) The word subsidiarity has entered secular political language via Catholic Social Teaching in connection with the Maastricht Treaty, where its application was a British initiative. The principle of subsidiarity was defined by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) in the following terms:

"Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater or higher association what lesser and subordinate organisations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy or absorb them.

"The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly. Thereby the State will more freely, powerfully and effectively do all those things that belong to it alone because it alone can do them: directing, watching, urging, restraining, as occasion requires and necessity demands. Therefore those in power should

be sure that the more perfectly a graduated order is kept among the various associations, in observance of the principle of subsidiary function, the stronger social authority and effectiveness will be, the happier and more prosperous the condition of the State" (paragraph 80).

52) It will be seen that the principle of subsidiarity is no ally of those who favour the maximisation of State power, or centralisation of the State at the expense of more local institutions. It supports a dispersal of authority as close to the grass roots as good government allows, and it prefers local over central decision-making. Subsidiarity also implies the existence of a range of institutions below the level of the State: some of these bodies are for the making of decisions affecting individuals, some are for influencing the way those decisions are made. Throughout Pius XI's teaching there is an implicit and intimate relationship between subsidiarity and the common good. Society as envisaged by Catholic Social Teaching should be made up of many layers, which will be in complex relationships with one another but which will be ordered as a whole towards the common good, in accordance with the principle of solidarity.

53) In the context of constitutional reforms, we would draw attention to the importance of retaining the connection between subsidiarity and solidarity, two fundamental and inseparable principles of this body of teaching. Subsidiarity should never be made an excuse for selfishness nor promoted at the expense of the common good or to the detriment of the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the community. Pope John Paul II defined the concept of solidarity in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* in the following terms:

"The fact that men and women in various parts of the world feel personally affected by the injustices and violations of human rights committed in distant countries, countries which perhaps they will never visit, is a further sign of a reality transformed into awareness, thus acquiring a moral connotation.

"It is above all a question of interdependence, sensed as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements, and accepted as a moral category. When interdependence becomes recognised in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a 'virtue', is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all" (paragraphs 38.3-38.4).



## **Part 2: Application to contemporary questions**

54) The Church would be failing in moral courage if its social teaching were allowed to remain at the level of broad generalities in order to avoid controversy. As bishops, we have a particular responsibility to discern and interpret the signs of the times, even at the risk of sometimes being mistaken. There are trends in British society and political life which seem to us to be contrary to Catholic teaching, as well as features of public and private morality which are commendable. Committed as we are to the promotion of the Church's social teaching, we believe there are many aspects of present British society which merit critical examination in the light of it.

55) We do not do this critical examination in a detached way, for we are part of British society and subject to the same examination. Nor do we do it any partisan spirit, for while none of the main political parties merits unqualified support from Catholics, none of them is excluded from that support in principle. We note with approval the commitment to the common good which has often been expressed in Conservatism, the special place that Labour has traditionally given to the alleviation of poverty and the defence of workers' rights, and the stress placed by Liberal Democrats on local democracy.

56) Some of the papal encyclicals on social teaching, especially those of Leo XIII and Pius XI, described socialism as containing a philosophy of humanity which was incompatible with Catholic teaching. For generations now, bishops of the Catholic Church in England and Wales have judged that the Labour Party, though it has described itself as having a commitment to socialism, does not correspond to those continental socialist movements which the popes decried. Nor does the papal condemnation of unlimited free-market, or laissez-faire, capitalism apply indiscriminately to the Conservative Party.

### **The political vocation**

57) There is a strong Christian tradition of public service in all the major British parties which we wish to applaud, and we particularly wish to declare our respect and gratitude towards all those who undertake the responsibilities of political life, whatever party they belong to. We are especially grateful to Catholic citizens who join and play an active part in the political party of their choice, provided they take their Catholic principles, including those set out in this document, with them. We offer them every possible encouragement.

58) Not the least of the concerns we have at this time is the low status of politicians in public estimation, which is neither justified by the evidence nor good for the health of democracy. Politics is an honourable vocation, which often exacts great personal cost from those who engage in it, and from their families. The fact that some politicians from time to time fall short of the highest standards is not grounds for dismissing the whole class of politician as unworthy of respect.

59) An attitude of cynicism towards those engaged in public life is one of those tendencies against which we feel we must speak out. Not the least of its harmful consequences could be the discouragement of those contemplating a political career. It is the teaching of the Church that all rightful authority comes from God, and therefore those who exercise legitimate political authority are worthy of respect. It is not ignoble to want a successful political career, nor dishonourable for politicians to seek political power.

60) At the same time politicians must be especially careful not to use, or to appear to use, their privileged position for personal gain. Those politicians who have, by their behaviour, contributed to a climate of distrust must bear some considerable responsibility. Part of the responsibility must also lie with the highly partisan quality of public political debate, where it has become almost customary to attribute the worst motives to one's political opponents. Politicians of one party should show more respect towards those of other parties. Those who engage in political abuse can expect retaliation in kind, and they are inviting the public to believe the worst about all politicians of every political persuasion.

61) This climate of mutual personal distrust and abuse has at times been fostered quite recklessly by the mass media. It is a constant theme of Christ's teaching in the Gospels that one should be more conscious of one's own sinfulness than of the sins of others. Political debate in Britain badly needs re-moralising and the injection into it of an element of sincere humility, if people are to regain faith in it. If they do not regain faith in it, the outlook for the future of democracy in Britain is not good.

### **Specific issues in a general election**

62) We find quite compatible with Catholic Social Teaching the British constitutional doctrine that while a general election is the election of individuals to act on behalf of their constituents in Parliament, those elected are not mere delegates. That is to say the political allegiance of the candidate is only one of various considerations it is proper to take into account.

63) Many of the issues that an MP has to face in the life of a Parliament are not known at the time of an election. One of the most important questions an elector has to enquire into at an election is therefore about the attitude and character of each candidate. It is relevant to take into account what is known about a candidate's personal morality, although this does not condone intrusion into individual privacy. The question must be: can an elector be confident that the person for whom he or she is voting is the best of those offering themselves - the best to make judgements on behalf of the elector on matters not yet conceived of, as well as those which are being aired in the election?

64) This consideration will discourage the making of a choice solely on the basis of one policy issue alone, even where the attitudes of a candidate on such an issue are at variance with Catholic teaching. On the other hand, the attitude of a candidate on that one issue may indicate a general philosophy or personal bias, for instance contempt for those who uphold the sacredness of human life, which Catholics will find deeply objectionable.

65) These are matters to be explored within an election campaign, examining both the policies advanced by the candidates and the reasoning behind those policies. And it is an important part of British constitutional doctrine that even after an election, MPs have a duty to represent all their constituents, not just those who voted for them. There are many ways that argument, persuasion and legitimate pressure can be brought to bear on an MP by constituents who object to that MP's performance in a particular respect, yet a general election must never be confused with a single-issue referendum. It is legitimate for an individual elector to say to a candidate: "I disagree with you totally on this one issue, but I may vote for you, and in return I shall want to come and talk to you further about the issue over which we disagree." It is most unlikely a candidate would decline a voter's offer of support on that basis.

### **The right to life**

66) Taking into account all these considerations, we would nevertheless remind Catholic electors of the alarming extent to which Britain has become a particular example of what the present Pope called a "culture of death". In the three decades since the passage of the Abortion Act, human life has been devalued to the extent where abortion is widely regarded as a remedy for any social or personal difficulties. We have to raise our voices in protest against all destruction of human life in the womb, and to the widespread blunting of consciences that has taken place since the Act was passed. Even casual abortion, often for the sake of mere personal convenience, now seems increasingly acceptable.

67) Too often the same mentality is brought to bear on other ethical issues raised by developments in medical technology, such as the treatment of those judged to be brain-dead and permanently unconscious, or elderly patients with a terminal illness, or human embryos conceived outside the womb as part of fertility treatment. The prevalence of

abortion, as well as being an evil in itself, has led to the widespread abandonment of fundamental moral principles, even in areas where their influence is most needed.

68) New ethical challenges in the field of medical treatment will not be satisfactorily resolved unless the foundations of medical ethics are securely rooted in respect for human life at all its stages. Everything involving the use or disposal of human life, as a means to another end, must be categorically rejected. The Catholic community has to renew its efforts to awaken the conscience of the majority of fellow citizens in these matters, and should draw encouragement from the widespread evidence of unease in the public mind. But we emphasise once again that all forms of public campaigning, especially on "life" issues, must be conducted non-violently and with respect for the law.

### **The common good and human welfare**

69) A central concept of Catholic Social Teaching is the common good, whose meaning is close to the traditional term "common weal". At times in the past the common good has been presented as an idea in opposition to the rights of individuals, therefore as a "collectivist" or "corporatist" political theory. But more recent social teaching has seen the common good as a guarantor of individual rights, and as the necessary public context in which conflicts of individual rights and interests can be adjudicated or reconciled.

70) Public authorities have the common good as their prime responsibility. The common good stands in opposition to the good of rulers or of a ruling (or any other) class. It implies that every individual, no matter how high or low, has a duty to share in promoting the welfare of the community as well as a right to benefit from that welfare. "Common" implies "all-inclusive": the common good cannot exclude or exempt any section of the population. If any section of the population is in fact excluded from participation in the life of the community, even at a minimal level, then that is a contradiction to the concept of the common good and calls for rectification.

71) If that exclusion comes about from poverty, even if only "relative poverty", then that poverty demands attention. Governments cannot be satisfied with provision for poor people designed only to prevent absolute poverty, such as actual starvation or physical homelessness. What level of social security provision is adequate to meet the criteria of the common good is a political judgement, and may indeed involve trial and error. But there must come a point at which the scale of the gap between the very wealthy and those at the bottom of the range of income begins to undermine the common good. This is the point at which society starts to be run for the benefit of the rich, not for all its members.

72) There are some ideological thinkers who advocate this approach. We would question their proposition that the further enrichment of the already wealthy must, as the inevitable result of economic laws, eventually also improve the lot of the less well-off and the poor. This proposition is contrary to common sense as well as to actual experience. Some of those who employ it may merely be seeking justification for the pursuit of their own economic interests. Even from the point of view of the wealthy this is self-defeating. Jesus in the Gospels repeatedly warns about the dangers of over-attachment to material riches. Those dangers are not just to the individual, but also to the community.

73) The Church's social teaching can be summed up as the obligation of every individual to contribute to the good of society, in the interests of justice and in pursuit of the "option for the poor". This is the context most likely to foster human fulfilment for everyone, where each individual can enjoy the benefit of living in an orderly, prosperous and healthy society. A society with insufficient regard for the common good would be unpleasant and dangerous to live in, as well as unjust to those it excluded.

74) Catholic Social Teaching recognises the fundamental and positive value of business, the market, private property and free human creativity in the economic sector. But

sometimes market forces cannot deliver what the common good demands, and other remedies have to be sought. The real "poor" in a relatively prosperous Western society are those without sufficient means to take part in the life of the community. This means they cannot participate in the formation of public policies that might protect them from the adverse consequences of market forces. By poverty they are excluded from the community, and they are denied the rights of membership. Their choices are circumscribed; they have little personal freedom.

75) In a developed democratic society such as ours, this is one area in which electors in a general election and members of all political parties can make good their individual "option for the poor". The first duty of the citizen towards the common good is to ensure that nobody is marginalised in this way and to bring back into a place in the community those who have been marginalised in the past. The alternative is the creation of an alienated "underclass", bereft of any sense of participation in or belonging to the wider community. The existence of such an "underclass" can never be regarded as a price worth paying in return for some other social advantages to be enjoyed by the majority.

### **Morality in the market place**

76) The Catholic doctrine of the common good is incompatible with unlimited free-market, or laissez-faire, capitalism, which insists that the distribution of wealth must occur entirely according to the dictates of market forces. This theory presupposes that the common good will take care of itself, being identified with the summation of vast numbers of individual consumer decisions in a fully competitive, and entirely free, market economy. Its central dogma (as expressed by Adam Smith, the founding father of capitalist theory, in his *The Wealth of Nations* 1776) is the belief that in an entirely free economy, each citizen, through seeking his own gain, would be "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention", namely the prosperity of society. This does sometimes happen; but to say that it invariably must happen, as if by a God-given natural law, is a view which can amount to idolatry or a form of economic superstition. Smith himself did not appear to think the rule was invariable, for he also observed "By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of society..." (italics added).

77) The Catholic Church, in its social teaching, explicitly rejects belief in the automatic beneficence of market forces. It insists that the end result of market forces must be scrutinised and if necessary corrected in the name of natural law, social justice, human rights, and the common good. Left to themselves, market forces are just as likely to lead to evil results as to good ones. It is often overlooked that Adam Smith himself did not envisage markets operating in a value-free society, but assumed that individual consumer choices would be governed by moral considerations, not least the demands of justice.

78) The Church recognises that market forces, when properly regulated in the name of the common good, can be an efficient mechanism for matching resources to needs in a developed society. No other system has so far shown itself superior in encouraging wealth creation and hence in advancing the prosperity of the community, and enabling poverty and hardship to be more generously relieved. Centrally commanded economies, in contrast, have been seen to be inefficient, wasteful, and unresponsive to human needs. Nor have they fostered a climate of personal liberty. In a market economy the existence of a wide variety of consumer choice means that individual decisions can be made according to individual wants and needs, thus respecting certain aspects of human freedom and following the principle of subsidiarity. Moreover the good functioning of the market requires ethical behaviour and the embodiment of certain ethical principles within a regulatory and legal framework. This reflects the corresponding principle of solidarity. There is no doubt, too, that competition can often harness creative energy and encourage product innovation and improvement.

79) The distinction has always to be kept in mind between a technical economic method and a total ideology or world view. Catholic Social Teaching has constantly been aware of the tendency of free market economic theory to claim more for itself than is warranted. In particular, an economic creed that insists the greater good of society is best served by each individual pursuing his or her own self-interest is likely to find itself encouraging individual selfishness, for the sake of the economy. Christian teaching that the service of others is of greater value than the service of self is sure to seem at odds with the ethos of a capitalist economy.

80) As a result of that ethos there is bound to be a general discouragement and devaluing of unselfish actions, and the cultivation of the cynical assumption that those engaged in unselfish actions do in fact have hidden selfish motives. This attitude is one of the causes of the general discredit in which politicians and other public servants are held. It has wide implications for the moral health of society generally. Those who advocate unlimited free-market capitalism and at the same time lament the decline in public and private morality, to which the encouragement of selfishness is a prime contributing factor, must ask themselves whether the messages they are sending are in fact mutually contradictory. People tend to need more encouragement to be unselfish than to be selfish, so it is not difficult to imagine which of these two messages will have most influence. A wealthy society, if it is a greedy society, is not a good society.

#### **Option against the poor?**

81) These are among the reasons why the Catholic Church has remained cautious and on guard towards free market economics for more than a hundred years, and why we think it is time to re-emphasise in our society the concept of the common good. It provides the criteria by which public authorities can distinguish between those economic activities that can safely be left to market forces, and those that require regulation, state intervention, or full provision by the public sector. The dividing line will be different at different periods. But Catholic Social Teaching, while it recognises that there are at times merits in the market principle, resists the conclusion that that principle should be extended wherever possible. It is always the business of public authority to arbitrate between the sometimes conflicting demands of a market economy and the common good.

82) Public authorities must maintain a critical distance from an ideological view that free markets can do no wrong. The concept of competition implies that there will be failures as well as successes, and under market conditions early signs of failure may cause more rapid collapse. Therefore, where such social provisions as health and education are concerned, the common good requires a supervising authority that can step in with remedies as soon as deficiencies become apparent, rather than waiting until the logic of the market causes failing institutions to close, harming those who must still rely on them. There are, of course, circumstances in which, after due consideration, deliberate closure and the making of alternative arrangements will serve the common good.

83) Furthermore social services in general need other incentives than pure profit, and the introduction of market forces in this area has sometimes demeaned or damaged the sense of vocation and dedication to others that has traditionally been a hallmark of the professions involved. The ethos of public service, in the public sector and especially in local and national government, is an important public asset that must be safeguarded by every possible means.

84) The search for profit must not be allowed to override all other moral considerations. For instance the creation and stimulation of markets by advertising is in danger of producing a society where the satisfaction of real or artificial needs takes priority over all else. It leads to an ideology of consumerism. The individual is reduced to the status of an isolated economic agent, whose life has meaning only as a consumer.

85) Those most likely to suffer from over-reliance on competition to the detriment of the common good are the poor, vulnerable, powerless and defenceless. 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".

### **The mass media**

86) The mass media have a particular responsibility, which needs redefining in this context. While Britain continues to enjoy standards of broadcasting which are rightly admired elsewhere, those standards cannot be taken for granted. There is, for instance, a constant drift towards more screen violence, greater use of obscene language and ever more explicit depictions of intimate sexual activity. It cannot be argued that broadcasters are merely responding to changes in public taste, as they play a major part in shaping that taste.

87) We must point out that it is always easier to drive taste in these matters downwards rather than upwards. Each step is a small one, by itself. If nobody takes responsibility for each incremental movement, however, the eventual result will be the decay of public standards of decency to the point where they no longer exist, yet without at any time a deliberate decision having been made by society that this is what it wants. This is one more domain where a large number of individual consumer choices, exercised under the supposed sovereignty of free market forces, can have a markedly deleterious effect on the common good.

88) This is even more the case in the domain of newspapers. There seems to be a decline in regard for the common good in this industry, and an assumption that "giving readers what readers want" is more often than not the only justification necessary for publication. Proprietors and editors, answerable to nobody, have never had more editorial skill and talent available to them, but never have they used them to such poor moral advantage.

89) Journalists and their editors need constant reminding of the requirement to separate the reporting of fact from the presentation of speculation and comment, the need for fairness in handling allegations damaging to individuals, and above all of a general sense of moral responsibility for the good of society. But moral responsibility does not always sell newspapers. We are concerned about the dangerous consequences for the common good when market forces in the mass media are pushed to their logical conclusion, a process of which we see some evidence. Contrary to the optimistic expectations of the beneficial fruits of competition that were made by Adam Smith, there are signs that it is a characteristic principle of newspaper economics that bad journalism will drive out good.

### **The world of work**

90) Work is more than a way of making a living: it is a vocation, a participation in God's creative activity. Work increases the common good. The creation of wealth by productive action is blessed by God and praised by the Church, as both a right and a duty. When properly organised and respectful of the humanity of the worker, it is also a source of fulfilment and satisfaction. At best, workers should love the work they do. The treatment of workers must avoid systematically denying them that supreme measure of satisfaction. We would oppose an unduly negative view of work even from a Christian perspective, which would regard it purely as a burden of drudgery; or even worse, a curse consequent upon the Fall. On the contrary, even before the Fall human work was the primary means whereby humanity was to co-operate with and continue the work of the Creator, by responding to God's invitation to "subdue the earth".

91) Workers have rights which Catholic teaching has consistently maintained are superior to the rights of capital. These include the right to decent work, to just wages, to security

of employment, to adequate rest and holidays, to limitation of hours of work, to health and safety protection, to non-discrimination, to form and join trade unions, and, as a last resort, to go on strike. The Catholic Church has always deplored the treatment of employment as nothing more than a form of commercial contract. This leads to a sense of alienation between a worker and his or her labour. Instead, forms of employment should stress the integration of work and worker, and encourage the application of creative skills.

92) The Church insists that an employed person is a full human being, not a commodity to be bought and sold according to market requirements. Recognition of the humanity of the employee should persuade managements to bring their workforce into creative partnership, and to regard employees as entitled to a fair share in any rewards as a result of increased profits. Profits should not be regarded as solely of interest to managers or shareholders, but as a source of a social dividend in which others have a right to benefit. The Church recognises that co-ownership and worker shareholding schemes can sometimes offer more human ways of running business and industry than the traditional sharp separation of employees from employers.

93) The Church's social teaching has always deplored an "us and them" attitude between managers and workforce. Industrial relations should not be organised in a way that fosters such confrontational attitudes. On the one hand, it is possible for employers to be unfairly disadvantaged by an imbalance in the relative economic strength of each side in negotiation, for instance when a trade union exploits a monopoly control of the supply of labour. On the other hand, trade union activity is sometimes a necessary corrective to managerial policies which are devoted purely to profit, regardless of the interests of workers. There can be a substantial imbalance of economic power between an isolated individual employee and a large employer, and this imbalance is not corrected merely by the fact that the employee has entered into a contract. Contracts between unequal parties are a potent source of structural injustice.

94) Trade unions have a role in correcting this imbalance, and membership of a union is a right the Church upholds as a manifestation of the principle of solidarity and of the right of association. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has reminded Catholics that where possible they should join an appropriate trade union. We do not think the decline in union membership in recent years is necessarily a healthy sign, and we note that it is paralleled by a high degree of dissatisfaction with their working lives that many ordinary people express. We must repeat, however, the consistent warnings given in Catholic Social Teaching against trade unions being too closely associated with political parties.

95) Employers are not entitled to negate the right to join a trade union by refusing to have any dealings with union representatives. Where a majority of employees in a particular work group opt to be represented by their union for collective bargaining, it is unreasonable of an employer to refuse that demand. In certain circumstances the law may have to intervene to protect these rights.

96) At the same time, unions which are granted legal protection or a special legal status have a duty to conduct their affairs in accordance with the common good. Workers contemplating a strike have a duty to take account of the likely effects of their action on other groups, whether workers, users or consumers. It is unfair for those taking part in an industrial dispute to use the inflicting of hardship or serious inconvenience on such third parties as deliberate tactics. Their dispute is with their employer, not the public. They must also take a responsible view of the profitability and financial viability of their employer.

97) Employers, meanwhile, have a duty to pay a just wage, the level of which should take account of the needs of the individual and not just his or her value on the so-called

labour market. If employers do not do this voluntarily, Catholic Social Teaching would allow the State to make them do so by means of a statutory minimum wage, either nationally or in some sectors. It is not morally acceptable to seek to reduce unemployment by letting wages fall below the level at which employees can sustain a decent standard of living.

98) Employers who pay only the level of wage that the labour market demands, however low, are avoiding their moral responsibilities for the welfare of their employees. Where wages do fall below the level necessary for maintaining an appropriate standard of living, the state may step in. Nevertheless Catholic Social Teaching, in the light of the principle of subsidiarity, does not regard State welfare provision as a desirable substitute for payment of a just wage. Nor is this an acceptable excuse for employers to pay inadequate wages, thereby adding a further burden to the taxpayer. It is much to be preferred that employers should understand their duties to their employees correctly, so that they should want to pay a just wage regardless of whether they are obliged by law to do so. This is not of course to disparage social benefits to support family life for those in employment as well as for those unemployed.

### **Europe**

99) The Church's social teaching also applies internationally. One of the most important issues facing this country is its future relationship with the rest of Europe - and not just with the European Union. The history of the whole continent is intimately tied up with the history of Christianity. Although all European states are pluralist societies, the churches still have a crucial role in safeguarding and promoting the moral and spiritual values which gave Europe its soul. Those values, which Christians share with other faiths, are essential if the continent is to regain its moral health and spiritual vitality.

100) Solidarity and subsidiarity are two principles which should govern relations between individual states and the wider international community. Solidarity is expressed at many levels - family, neighbourhood, region, nation, the continent itself, and the whole planet. Local loyalties and commitments are important and should be fostered, but they should not be set in opposition to these wider expressions of solidarity. It is possible to be both British and European.

101) The principle of subsidiarity applies particularly to Britain's relations with the European Union, especially the extent to which social, financial and monetary decisions ought to be made at European Union level or national level, or devolved further to regional or local assemblies. There may well be legitimate differences over which arrangements are most likely to respect the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, and promote the European common good. But those principles cannot be set aside in this current debate.

### **The global common good**

102) In an increasingly global society, the unit of human community to which the term "common good" applies moves from the national to the international level. Hence solidarity has an inescapable universal dimension. Solidarity requires action to protect the common good at this level, where it can only be safeguarded by the collaboration of all. The universal common good is violated if there are places anywhere in the world where basic needs like clean water, food, shelter, health care, education and livelihood are not available to all or if the rights and dignity of all are not respected. The concept of an international or global common good demands that no nation should be left incapable of participation in the global economy because it is too poor or too much in debt.

103) The Catholic Church has repeatedly emphasised that an international economic order that condemns large sections of the world population to a permanent state of abject poverty is grossly unjust. Yet in recent years there has been a steady decline in overseas development assistance from the wealthier to the poorer countries. Some aid



flows have been dissipated through corruption or civil strife, but there has also been a retreat from solidarity between richer and poorer societies. This must be resisted. Catholic Social Teaching affirms the vital role of overseas aid which is properly managed and effectively targeted, to enable the poor to participate in grassroots development. We recall that the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has urged successive governments to work towards the long-standing United Nations target for overseas aid of 0.7% of Gross National Product.

104) The debt burden is a major factor in perpetuating poverty. Development has been halted and reversed by the debt service obligations of some of the poorest countries to their foreign creditors. Fortunately, most of those responsible for managing the international economic system have realised the ultimate futility of forcing repayment of unpayable debt as the price of continuing international assistance. We would encourage public opinion to support the British government in maintaining a leading role in resolving the international debt crisis. Without a comprehensive solution, the necessary conditions for aid, trade and investment for poor countries are missing. The major industrial countries and the international institutions they largely control need to act in solidarity with the poorer countries to achieve an outcome based on justice.

105) The Church has consistently warned of the dangers of too great a reliance on free market principles alone in economic relations between very unequal international partners. Under free trade the strong compete with the weak, the developed with the underdeveloped. International co-operation and regulation are needed to protect weak and vulnerable countries in their transition to full participation in the global economy. Solidarity of the human family will also require the developed world to restrict the promotion of arms sales to poor countries, to open further their own markets to the products of the developing world, actively to support the establishment of appropriate regional security structures, and to refrain from imposing harsh economic adjustment programmes on the poorest countries which curtail essential social expenditure on health and education, especially for women.

### **The environmental common good**

106) The Church recognises that care for the environment is part of care for the common good - the environment is one of the "common goods" which are the shared responsibility of the human race. We have to reject some of the easy assumptions of an earlier stage of industrialisation, such as that the human race, because God had given it dominion over the world, had an unlimited freedom to despoil the natural environment for its own purposes. Those who feel moved to a loving care for the internal balances of nature are responding to a deep religious instinct implanted within them by God. Their intuition tells them that the human race takes its place on this planet as a gift and privilege, and needs to cultivate what the new Catechism of the Catholic Church calls a "religious respect for the integrity of creation" (paragraph 2415).

107) Our environmental "common goods" are not only available for careful use and enjoyment today, but are held in trust for the use and enjoyment of future generations. Public authorities must never treat them as having no intrinsic worth, nor commercial concerns see them merely as sources of profit or loss. Regarded in those terms, the environment is a great repository of natural wealth, belonging to all humanity, present and future, freely and equally. Because of this environmental mortgage that the future holds over the present, none of this natural wealth can be owned outright, as if nobody but the owner had any say in its disposal. Each generation takes the natural environment on loan, and must return it after use in as good or better condition as when it was first borrowed.

108) In recent years one of the prime duties of public authorities has become the careful conservation of this environmental dimension of the "common good". Damage to the environment is no respecter of frontiers, and damage done by one generation has the

capacity to damage future generations: these are among the most powerful reasons for desiring the creation of effective global authorities responsible for the common good at international level.

### **Ownership and property**

109) The ownership of wealth is a right the Church protects, and regards as an essential ingredient and safeguard of human freedom. Measures designed to increase the spread of ownership are desirable, subject to the common good. But the ownership is governed by a "social mortgage", and past abuses of the ownership of wealth have led Catholic Social Teaching to accept significant restrictions on the rights of wealth owners.

110) On the other hand we note with approval the greatly increased distribution of ownership of capital assets in Britain, through investment trusts, pension funds, insurance companies and the like. This has given a much larger share of the population an indirect stake in the profitability of companies in the private sector. It is no longer a feature of the British economy that the means for the production of wealth are largely concentrated in the hands of a few. However, this does not absolve institutional investors from all responsibility for the way their shareholdings are used. It cannot be right that all the moral responsibilities of ownership are ended when ownership is channelled through shareholding, nor can it be right that the managers of such shareholdings should feel their only obligation to the owners is to maximise their returns, within the limits set by law. Both managers and shareholders have a social responsibility, which the law in Britain needs to recognise.

111) The economy exists for the human person, not the other way round. Any economic enterprise has a range of "stakeholders": shareholders, suppliers, managers, workers, consumers, the local community, even the natural environment. None of these interests should prevail to the extent that it excludes the interests of the others. A manager in one enterprise may be the consumer of the products of another, the neighbour of a third, the supplier of a fourth, a shareholder in a fifth; and may subsequently become a redundant ex-employee, the victim of the very policies that as a manager he or she may have helped to create.

112) Employers need reminding that their employees as a body constitute a form of "social capital", a reservoir of human effort, wisdom and experience. Accountancy methods which have to disregard such assets in the valuation of a commercial concern or in drawing up a balance sheet are inevitably guilty of false accounting, for they fail to make visible the resources of human skill and judgement which that company has at its disposal. This dumping of human "social capital", which the Catholic Church must deplore, is a prevalent cause of social injustice in modern society. It often occurs in company "downsizing" operations associated with takeovers, closures and mergers.

### **Crisis in the social dimension**

113) The British people are not alone in facing the problems to which we have drawn attention. But they should beware of the tendency, which seems more marked in Britain than elsewhere, to look to the future not for solutions but for more problems. To reduce this tendency to a partisan debate about whether or not the so-called "feel-good" factor is returning, and to reduce that question in turn to one of purely economic expectations, is to fail to see that the nation's real crisis is not economic, but moral and spiritual.

114) This crisis concerns loss of individual belief and confusion over personal moral behaviour. But the social dimension is no less in crisis. Surveys and studies of the national mood display a nation ill at ease with itself. Such surveys tell us that the British do not look forward to their society becoming fairer or more peaceful. They no longer expect security, either in employment or in personal relationships. They accept fatefully but without enthusiasm the prospect of their lives being increasingly dominated by

impersonal economic forces which leave little room for morality. They seem to be losing faith in the possibility of a better future.

115) As a result of this loss of confidence in the public arena, people seek space for personal fulfilment by turning increasingly to their private world. There is a retreat from the public level of community involvement to the domestic and individual sphere. This process of privatisation may well throw more weight than it can bear upon a fragile personal relationship, often a marriage relationship. Thus the very place where satisfaction and security is sought becomes the place where it is less likely to be obtainable.

116) The British have always had a feeling for "the common good" even if they have not expressed it in those terms. They are no longer sure that that principle can be relied upon. They hear it questioned in theory and ignored in practice. It increasingly appears to be an illusion. This loss of confidence in the concept of the common good is one of the primary factors behind the national mood of pessimism. It betrays a weakening of the sense of mutual responsibility and a decline in the spirit of solidarity - the crumbling of the cement that binds individuals into a society. The prospect of the new Millennium just ahead has so far failed to stir the national imagination to a new sense of vision and purpose, precisely for these reasons. We view with particular concern the danger that our young people will turn their backs on the political process because they see it as selfish, empty and corrupt. At the same time young people often show remarkable generosity and commitment to particular causes. It is important that they be encouraged to build on that generosity and see that the good of society as a whole deserves their commitment and idealism.

117) We believe the principles we have outlined in this document are the necessary minimum conditions for a fair and prosperous society. A society without those conditions will show many of the symptoms which are present in British society now. The present Pope, in his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), made this comment on the present stage of history:

"If therefore our time, the time of our generation, the time that is approaching the end of the second millennium of the Christian era, shows itself to be a time of great progress, it is also seen as a time of threat to humanity in many forms. The Church must speak of this threat to all people of goodwill and must always carry on a dialogue with them about it. Humanity's situation in the modern world seems indeed to be far removed from the objective demands of the moral order, from the requirements of justice, and even more of social love" (paragraph 16).

118) Pope John Paul goes on to speak of the eloquent teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning humanity's sharing in the kingship of Christ, and adds: "The essential meaning of this 'kingship' and 'dominion' of man over the visible world, which the Creator himself gave man for his task, consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and the superiority of spirit over matter." We believe that it is in the growing priority of technology over ethics, in the growing primacy of things over persons, and in the growing superiority of matter over spirit, that the most serious threats to British society now lie.

119) For these threats to be resisted, the political arena has to be reclaimed in the name of the common good. Public life needs rescuing from utilitarian expediency and the pursuit of self-interest. Society must not turn its back on poor people nor on the stranger at the gate. The twin principles of solidarity and subsidiarity need to be applied systematically to the reform of the institutions of public life. The protection of human rights must be reinforced, the mechanisms of democracy repaired, the integrity of the environment defended. The common good must be made to prevail, even against strong economic forces that would deny it.

120) The Catholic Church knows from its social teaching that all this is possible, and that no social trend, however negative, is beyond reversal. We urge the Catholic people of England and Wales to take up the challenge of applying to our society all the principles of Catholic Social Teaching that we have outlined, and thus to advance the common good in collaboration with likeminded citizens of every political and religious allegiance.

*Statement of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales*  
October 1996

## **Appendix I: Extracts from Catholic Social Teaching**

### ***Pope Leo XIII (Rerum Novarum, 1891):***

A tiny group of extravagantly rich men have been able to lay upon the great multitude of unpropertied workers a yoke little better than that of slavery itself. (2)

When socialists endeavour to transfer privately owned goods into common ownership they worsen the condition of all wage-earners. By taking away from them freedom to dispose of their wages they rob them of all hope and opportunity of increasing their possessions and bettering their conditions. (4)

[As a result...] all incentives for individuals to exercise their ingenuity and skill would be removed and the very fountains of wealth dry up. The dream of equality would become the reality of equal want and degradation for all. (12)

What is truly shameful and inhuman is to misuse men as instruments for gain and to value them only as so much mere energy and strength. (16)

The one purpose for which the State exists is common to the highest and lowest within it. By nature, the right of the unpropertied men to citizenship is equal to that of the wealthy owners of the means of production, for they through their families are among the true and living parts which go to form the body of the State. It is evident that the public authorities ought to take proper care to safeguard the lives and well-being of the unpropertied class. (34)

Private means must not be exhausted by excessive taxation... To take from private citizens under the guise of taxation more than is equitable is unjust and inhuman. (35)

The first task is to save the wretched workers from the brutality of those who make use of human beings as mere instruments for the unrestrained acquisition of profits. (43)

The wage ought not to be in any way insufficient for the bodily needs of a temperate and well-behaved worker. If having no alternative and fearing a worse fate, a workman is forced to accept harder conditions imposed by an employer or contractor, he is the victim of violence against which justice cries out. (45)

The condition of the workers is the question of the hour. It will be answered one way or another, rationally or irrationally, and which way it goes is of the greatest importance to the state. (58.1)

### ***Pope Pius XI (Quadragesimo Anno, 1931):***

The amount of pay must be adjusted to the public economic good... The opportunity to work [must] be provided to those who are able and willing to work... An excessive lowering of wages, or their increase beyond due measure, causes unemployment. Hence it is contrary to the common good when, for the sake of personal gain and without regard for the common good, wages and salaries are excessively lowered or raised. (74)

Labour... is not a mere commodity. On the contrary, the worker's human dignity in it must be recognised. It therefore cannot be bought and sold like a commodity. (83)

The right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces. From this source as from a poisoned spring have originated and spread all the errors of individualistic economic teaching. Destroying through forgetfulness or ignorance the social and moral character of economic life, it held that economic life must be considered and treated as altogether free from and independent of public authority, because in the

market, i.e. in the free struggle of competitors, it would have a principle of self-direction that governs it more perfectly than would the intervention of any created intellect. But free competition, while justified and certainly useful provided it is kept within certain limits, clearly cannot direct economic life - a truth which the outcome of the application in practice of the tenets of this evil individualistic spirit has more than sufficiently demonstrated. (88)

An immense power and despotic economic dictatorship is consolidated in the hands of a few, who often are not owners but only the trustees and managing directors of invested funds which they administer according to their own arbitrary will and pleasure. (105)

This concentration of power and might, the characteristic mark, as it were, of contemporary economic life, is the fruit that the unlimited freedom of struggle among competitors has of its own nature produced, and which lets only the strongest survive, and this is often the same as saying, those who fight the most violently, those who give least heed to their consciences. (107)

...a no less deadly and accursed internationalism of finance... whose country is where profit is. (109)

***Pope John XXIII (Pacem in Terris, 1963):***

One of the fundamental duties of civil authorities... is so to co-ordinate and regulate social relations that the exercise of one person's right does not threaten others in the exercise of their own rights. (62)

The common good requires that civil authorities maintain a careful balance between co-ordinating and protecting the rights of the citizens on the one hand, and promoting them, on the other. It should not happen that certain individuals or social groups derive special advantage from the fact that their rights have received preferential protection. (65)

A ruling authority is indispensable to civil society... authority must be exercised for the promotion of the common good. (83,84)

The universal common good requires the encouragement in all nations of every kind of reciprocation between citizens and their intermediate societies. There are many parts of the world where we find groupings of people of more or less different ethnic origin. Nothing must be allowed to prevent reciprocal relations between them. (100)

The deep feelings of paternal love for all of humanity which God has implanted in our heart make it impossible for us to view without bitter anguish of spirit the plight of those who for political reasons have been exiled from their own homelands. There are a great number of such refugees at the present time, and many are the sufferings - the incredible sufferings - to which they are constantly exposed. (103)

***Second Vatican Council (Gaudium et Spes, 1965):***

It cannot be denied that people are often diverted from doing good and spurred towards evil by the social circumstances in which they live and were immersed from their birth. The disturbances which so frequently occur in the social order result in part from the natural tensions of economic, political and social forms. But at a deeper level they flow from pride and selfishness, which contaminate even the social sphere. When the social structure is flawed by the consequences of sin, the human being, already born with a bent towards evil, finds there new inducements to sin, which cannot be overcome without strenuous efforts and the assistance of grace. (25.2)

There is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person, since he stands above all things, and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Therefore, there must be made available to all men and women everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family; the right to education and employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norms of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and to rightful freedom, even in matters religious. (26.1)

This Council lays stress on reverence for humanity; everyone must consider his every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary to living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concerns for the poor man Lazarus. (27)

Excessive economic and social inequalities within the one human family, between individuals and between peoples, give rise to scandal and are contrary to social justice, to equity, and to the dignity of the human person, as well as to peace within society and at the international level. (29.2)

God destined the earth and all that it contains for the use of all human beings and all peoples... Furthermore, the right to have a share of earthly goods, sufficient for oneself and one's family, belongs to everyone. (69)

The Church does not rest its hopes on privileges offered to it by civil authorities; indeed it will even give up the exercise of certain legitimately acquired rights in situations where it has been established their use calls in question the sincerity of its witness... (76.4)

Peace is not merely the absence of war, nor can it be reduced solely to the balance of power between enemies, nor is it brought about by dictatorship. (78)

Peace on earth cannot be obtained unless personal well-being is safeguarded and men and women freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their inner spirits and their talent. A firm determination to respect the dignity of other individuals and peoples, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood, are absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace. (78.1)

***Pope Paul VI (Populorum Progressio, 1967):***

Certain concepts have somehow arisen... that present profit as the chief spur to economic progress, free competition as the guiding norm of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right, having no limits or concomitant social obligations. This unbridled liberalism paves the way for a particular type of tyranny. (26)

It is evident that the principle of free trade, by itself, is no longer adequate for regulating international agreements. It certainly can work when both parties are about equal... But the case is quite different when the nations involved are far from equal. Market prices that are freely agreed upon can turn out to be quite unfair. It must be avowed openly that in this case the fundamental tenet of liberalism as it is so called, as the norm for market dealings, is open to serious question... When two parties are in very unequal positions, their mutual consent does not alone guarantee a fair contract; the rule of free consent remains subservient to the demands of the natural law. (58)

***Pope Paul VI (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1975):***

At the main point and very centre of his Good News, Christ proclaims salvation; this is the great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses people, particularly liberation from sin and from the Evil One, together with the joy experienced when one knows God and is known by him, when one sees God and entrusts oneself to him. (9)

Evangelising means bringing the good news into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new... But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed... The Church evangelises when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and the collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieux which are theirs. (18)

***Pope John Paul II (Laborem Exercens, 1981):***

It is certainly true that work, as a human issue, is at the very centre of the 'social question' to which, for almost a hundred years, the Church's teaching and the many undertakings connected with her apostolic mission have been especially directed. (2)

We must emphasise and give prominence to the primacy of human beings in the production process, the primacy of human beings over things. Everything contained in the concept of capital in the strict sense is only a collection of things. The human being - as the subject of work, and independently of the work he does - and only the human being, is a person. (12.5)

The right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone... They cannot be possessed against labour, they cannot even be possessed for possession's sake, because the only legitimate title to their possession, whether in the form of private ownership or in the form of public or collective ownership, is that they should serve labour and thus by serving labour that they should make possible the achievement of the first principle of this order, namely the universal destination of goods and the right to common use of them. (14.1,2)

***Pope John Paul II (Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, 1984):***

Social sins are the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins. It is a case of the very personal sins of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it, of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference, or those who take refuge in the supposed impossibility of changing the world and also those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required, producing spurious reasons of a higher order. (16)

***Pope John Paul II (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 1987):***

Super-development consists in an excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit certain social groups, [which] easily makes people slaves of 'possession' and of immediate gratification, with no other horizon than the multiplication or continual replacement of the things already owned with others still better. This is the so-called civilisation of 'consumption' and 'consumerism'... One quickly learns that the more one possesses the more one wants. (28.1)

The sum total of the negative factors working against a true awareness of the universal common good and the need to further it gives the impression of creating, in persons and institutions, an obstacle that is difficult to overcome. If the present situation can be



attributed to difficulties of various kinds, it is not out of place to speak of structures of sin. (36.1)

Among the actions and attitudes opposed to the will of God, the good of neighbour and the structures created by them, two are very typical: on the one hand, the all consuming desire for profit, and on the other, the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one's will on others. (37)

Not only individuals fall victim to this double attitude of sin: nations and blocs can do so too. And this favours even more the introduction of the structures of sin. Behind certain decisions, apparently inspired only by economics or politics, are real forms of idolatry: of money, ideology, class, technology. (37.2)

***Pope John Paul II (Centesimus Annus, 1991):***

There are many human needs that find no place in the market. It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied... (34)

In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though the earth did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him. (37)

Although people are rightly worried - though much less than they should be - about preserving the natural habitats of the various animal species threatened with extinction because they realise that each of these species makes its particular contribution to the balance of nature in general, too little effort is made to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic 'human ecology'. Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given, but man too is God's gift to man. (38)

The first and fundamental structure for 'human ecology' is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person... It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. (39)

Certainly the mechanisms of the market offer secure advantages: they help to utilise resources better, they promote the exchange of products, above all they give central place to the person's desires and preferences, which, in a contract, meet the desires and preferences of another person. Nevertheless these mechanisms carry the risk of idolatry of the market, an idolatry which ignores the existence of goods which by their nature are not and cannot be mere commodities. (40)

Can it be said, after the failure of Communism, that capitalism is the victorious social system, and that capitalism should be the goal of the countries now making efforts to rebuild their economy and society? If by capitalism is meant an economic system which recognises the fundamental and positive value of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative though it would be perhaps more appropriate to speak of a business economy, market economy, or

simply a free economy. But if by capitalism is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative. (42)

The obligation to earn one's bread by the sweat of one's brow also presumes the right to do so. A society in which this right is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace. (43)

The Church has no models to present: models that are real and truly effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations, through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic and cultural aspects as these interact with one another. (43)

The State has the duty to sustain business activities by creating conditions which will ensure job opportunities, by stimulating those activities where they are lacking or by supporting them in moments of crisis. (48)

Excesses and abuses, especially in recent years, have provoked very harsh criticism of the welfare state, dubbed the "Social Assistance State"... By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending. (48)

The individual today is often suffocated between two poles represented by the State and the marketplace. At times it seems as though he exists only as a producer and consumer of goods, or as an object of State administration. (49)

Another name for peace is development. Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development. Just as within individual societies it is possible and right to organise a solid economy which will direct the functioning of the market to the common good, so too there is a similar need for adequate interventions on the international level. For this to happen, a great effort must be made to enhance mutual understanding and knowledge and to increase the sensitivity of consciences. (52)

***Pope John Paul II (Veritatis Splendor, 1993):***

In the political sphere, it must be noted that truthfulness in the relations between those governing and those governed, openness in public administration, impartiality in the service of the body politic, respect for the rights of accused against summary trials and convictions, the just and honest use of public funds, the rejection of equivocal or illicit means in order to gain, preserve or increase power at any cost - all these are principles which are primarily rooted in, and in fact derive their singular urgency from, the transcendental value of the human person and the objective moral demands of the functioning of the State. (101)

## **Appendix II: Catholic Resources**

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales recently set up a new co-ordinating body, the Catholic Agency for Social Concern (CASC). It is intended to help Catholic welfare agencies, groups, networks and local initiatives to come together to discuss priorities, to share support services, and to provide links with CARITAS Europe and with the relevant European Union social funding structures.

One of its first projects is a thorough "social audit" of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, to give for the first time an accurate overall picture of the Church's welfare resources and to see how they are being deployed at local level.

In the past, Catholic welfare agencies and similar bodies have generally not been centrally organised but based on local and diocesan needs. The survey which follows is therefore provisional, and is not intended to be comprehensive. In particular, it can take no account of ad hoc local initiatives.

The Catholic Church in England and Wales is divided into twenty-two dioceses. It has eighteen diocesan welfare agencies to cover them, with more than 1,500 staff and a turnover of at least £30 million per annum. The agencies vary in resources, size and activities, being most substantial where there are concentrations of Catholic population to support them as well as to make demands on their services. They also aim to serve the whole community regardless of race or creed.

The agencies supply fostering and adoption services, and social work with children and families; some provide child protection services, school counselling, family centres, and case work; some provide services for adults including those with learning disabilities, impairment of hearing or sight; some work for older people; some for the homeless. There are also numerous community projects. Many of these agencies also receive financial support from local and national government.

The national network of Catholic schools in the state sector is also carried out mainly through the diocesan system. The Catholic Church has a total of 2,000 primary schools, 450 secondary schools, with 746,000 pupils, 35,000 teachers, 17 sixth-form colleges and six colleges of higher education.

The Catholic community contributes nearly £20 million annually towards the maintenance and improvement of school buildings. This Catholic financial contribution represents a direct saving of public expenditure - it is money which would have to be raised in taxes if there were no Catholic school system. Catholic Education Services is the agency set up by the Bishops' Conference to provide common support services to these schools, and assist with representation to central government.

One of the best known agencies of the Catholic Church in England and Wales is CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development). It is one of the United Kingdom's major relief and development agencies. CAFOD's £9.4 million in voluntary income in 1995 represented just over half its total income.

CAFOD runs more than a thousand projects in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe. CAFOD works in co-operation with the international Catholic network of relief agencies (CARITAS) and development agencies (CIDSE).

Catholic Youth Services is the youth work agency of the Bishops' Conference. It serves a number of diocesan youth officers and residential diocesan youth centres.

In 1991 the Bishops' Conference set up an office for refugee work to monitor policy and practice in the UK and European Union. The Refugee Advisor convenes the Catholic

Refugee Forum which brings together organisations, groups and individuals working for refugees including two diocesan refugee officers and three religious congregations (communities of members of religious orders) responding to the needs of refugees.

There are numerous agencies and organisations at national level which are not directly dependent on the Bishops' Conference, but which at times are asked to assist the bishops' advisory committees on relevant social issues.

Catholic Marriage Care has a network of approximately 70 centres in England and Wales as well as a national headquarters. It provides marriage counselling for individuals or couples, marriage preparation courses, a service to support teachers in schools, and a natural family planning service. Its services are available to all.

Catholic Housing Aid Society (CHAS) is a national network of ten branches providing free professional advice to people who are homeless and in acute housing need. It also campaigns to improve policies on housing. It is entirely dependent on voluntary contributions.

The Bourne Trust (formerly Catholic Social Service for Prisoners) provides counselling and advice, assistance and support to those in prison and their families.

The Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) is a national membership organisation concerned to promote racial justice in Church and society. It was responsible for organising in 1990 the National Congress of Black Catholics.

The St Vincent de Paul Society has over 18,000 volunteers who make 1.5 million visits per year to needy people in their homes, hospitals, prisons and other institutions. Special projects include holidays for the needy, furniture stores, charity shops, children's camps, day centres, and hostels for the homeless, mentally afflicted, and young women at risk. It provides probation/bail hostels, support for refugees, unemployed people, and people with alcohol or drug problems. It has founded a housing association which is now a separate enterprise.

Justice and Peace Groups, of which there are 200 groups around the country, campaign on domestic and overseas issues of social justice. The groups are linked by a national liaison committee, and there are some paid workers at diocesan level.

There are nearly 300 communities of male and female members of religious orders, many of which are wholly or partly engaged in education and welfare work. The total number of members of religious orders in Britain exceeds 10,000. While some remain committed to their original mission - running hospitals and nursing homes, caring for children and elderly people in residential homes - there has been expansion into the field of day care, short-stay respite homes, special schools and hospitals, and hospices for terminally and chronically ill people.

Other religious communities have redefined their work to provide services to the most needy, for instance working in local communities, especially in depressed areas, and with marginalised people.

Through its membership of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI), The Churches Together in England and CYTUN (Wales), the Catholic Church in Britain now shares responsibility with other British Churches for the work of bodies which come under their auspices, and it supports them financially.

This summary gives a very incomplete picture and is by way of illustration of the Catholic community's range of commitments. Any omissions are not intended to represent a

judgement on the worth of any activity not here mentioned. The Catholic Directory, published annually, has a more comprehensive list of local, regional, national and specialist agencies supported by the Catholic community, as well as numerous other Catholic voluntary bodies and societies. In due course the results of the national audit of Catholic services and facilities being carried out by CASC will be published.

## **Introducing The Common Good - Suggestions for presenting and studying *The Common Good* in parishes and small groups**

- *The Common Good* is a major statement from the Catholic bishops of England and Wales, presenting the social teaching of the Catholic Church. This teaching is unfamiliar to some Catholics, and may be a surprise to others. *The Common Good* explains the basic principles of this teaching and begins to apply them to the challenges and choices we face in our society in England and Wales, especially as we approach a general election.
- The bishops' statement is intended first of all for Catholics to read and study, although it is offered also to other Christians and indeed, to anyone concerned about the future of our society.
- At the beginning of the statement, the bishops say they welcome discussion and collaboration in the application and development of this teaching.
- The bishops' statement does not cover all the social, political and moral issues which Catholics might be concerned about. But it does lay out the principles we need to apply when faced with particular questions. It is now for Catholics at all levels, and in all the different groups and communities to which they belong, to reflect on these principles, and judge the implications for themselves.

These suggestions aim to help parishes and any other interested Catholic groups to study the bishops' statement and apply the principles to for the issues and choices they face in their own local circumstances.

This is obviously important in the run up to the general election. But our responsibility to play a part in shaping our society carries on afterwards. Indeed, it is a permanent part of living Catholic faith.

- It is suggested that each parish, deanery or organisation should find a period of time - preferably around six weeks - in the next three months for studying and reflecting on *The Common Good*. Obviously the timing will be different in each situation. Some might begin immediately: others may prefer to wait until the new year. Of course, since there could be a general election called at any time, it is better to begin early rather than late.

### **How parishes can discuss *The Common Good***

There are many different ways of presenting and discussing the bishops' statement in a parish. Here are some suggestions.

- Parishes could encourage people to buy and read *The Common Good* throughout themselves, and make copies available for sale in the parish.
- Parish leaders could work with priests to plan a six week 'teaching' programme for the parish. This could consist of brief 'teaching' presentations at one or two of the masses each Sunday, either done by a priest or by someone else. These presentations could either take the place of a homily, or happen at the end of mass.

\* Each week, one central principle or theme could be presented. It will be easier for people to relate to these if they are explained in relation to real issues that affect people's lives, or if the person explaining can speak from their own experience about what the principle means.

\* For example, there may be Catholics locally who are involved in local politics, and could talk about subsidiarity from their experience.

\* Another way would be to take one local issue each week, and ask someone to explain how Catholic social teaching principles apply to that situation.

\* It would also be useful to include extracts from the statement in the parish bulletin, or to give out a page of extracts on a particular theme each week.

\* One theme could be highlighted each week in the parish liturgy - through prayers and visual materials such as posters. Children's liturgy groups and those preparing prayers and music could be invited to focus on this theme. Examples of themes include: solidarity; the common good; our stake as Catholics in society; our duty to participate.

- Parishes could plan a programme of discussion in small groups. It would need some people with experience of small groups to act as leaders and to plan a study programme using the notes in this leaflet. Then all those who might be interested should be invited to form small groups to meet over a six week period. If it is local custom to have ecumenical Lent groups, you might consider inviting other Christians, though of course, the material is drawn from Catholic tradition.
- Another possibility is to arrange a series of talks on themes from the booklet. There may be Catholics who are members of trade unions, or who are involved in business or welfare services or local politics or the media, who would be willing to come and take part. One possible format would be to ask a series of people to give a 30 minute talk on 'my response to the bishops' booklet from my experience as...' followed by discussion. Make sure each session has a brief time of reflection and prayer as well.
- It would also be important to encourage anyone who works with young people in the parish to arrange some meetings for them to discuss the general election from their point of view; or to find another way to invite the young people in the parish to say what they think about the future of society in the light of their faith. It might be possible gather those recently confirmed, or those active in the parish as readers or in any other parish groups. It might be helpful to look for leaders with experience of YCW to get this going. Local Catholic schools and sixth form colleges could also be asked to help.
- Some parishes might ask the organisations and groups in the parish to plan a study programme on the bishops' statement in their regular meetings. In particular, the UCM or CWL, the justice and peace group, the RCIA group and the parish council could be asked to set aside time for this purpose.

### **Suggestions for small group study and discussion**

These notes are to help you to use this document in small study groups. Your study group might be an established group who know each other and can get started quickly, or a new group brought together for this purpose. The following points always need to be remembered:

- Every group is different, and there are no absolute rules other than to adapt the material and methods to suit your group.
- If the group is to work, it is important to use a good method; here we suggest two: you or your group may be familiar with others.
- The group's work needs to be planned, and the group meeting should have a leader who knows the plan. Those planning and leading the group should keep in mind three priorities;

\* getting the right focus and content, and presenting these well so that people can relate to what is being discussed.

\* making sure that there is time for everyone to speak, and an atmosphere of listening

\* making sure that there is some quiet reflection and prayer so that it draws on people's faith and convictions, not just their opinions.

- The practical aspects also need thought: the place the group meets, starting and finishing on time, welcoming and introducing people, refreshments, copies of any handouts people need.

### **Two ways of using this text in small groups**

#### ***One: for groups interested in practical discussion***

The See-Judge-Act method will be familiar to many: it's very easy to use.

- After reading the whole booklet, choose six themes which can be related to local concerns or to issues the group might be interested to discuss. Examples might be:

Christian faith and politics  
Who we vote for, and why  
The right to life  
The common good and poverty  
The mass media  
The environment

You will need someone to prepare each week's meeting in the following way.

- For each theme, prepare a See-Judge-Act outline as follows:

**See:** First, discuss your theme using these questions:

- \* How does this issue or theme affect us locally?
- \* Who is affected? In what way? (Try to find some actual examples)
- \* What experience or knowledge of this matter do we have?
- \* What are our concerns, or questions about this issue?

**Judge:** Then someone should present a summary of points from the relevant sections of the booklet (it would be helpful to have these copied to give out; make sure there is no more than a page). Go through these with the group, making sure that people are clear about what is being said. Then discuss the points using these questions;

- \* What do you like or agree with?
- \* What do you disagree with or find difficult?
- \* What are the implications for the issues that affect us?
- \* What should we be doing about it, especially in relation to the General Election?

**Act:** Discuss action that members of the group could take, either as a group, or individually; plan who will do what, when.

- At the beginning of each meeting after the first one, spend a few minutes recalling the previous meeting. In particular, ask the group to share any further thoughts they have had, or any action they have carried out.



**Two: for groups who want to study**

- Make sure everyone who is going to take part in the group has a copy of *The Common Good*.
- Plan six meetings to study and discuss it, section by section. The group members should be asked to read the section to be discussed before they come to the meeting. Try to concentrate on about three or four pages at a time. Don't worry if you don't cover all the sections; choose those the group are most interested to discuss.
- Each time you meet, use this pattern;

\* Welcome, and a few minutes of prayer or silent reflection on a brief scripture reading.

\* Recall last week; did anyone have any further thoughts about what we were discussing?

\* Look at this week's sections; get someone to take 10-15 minutes to summarise what he or she sees as the main points being made, and to give a personal reaction.

\* Have a general discussion; questions you could use include the following:

What did you like or agree strongly with in these pages?

Is there anything you found difficult to accept, or disagreed with?

Are there any stories in this week's news, or any local issues, which these sections relate to?

What are the implications for any of these situations of Catholic Social Teaching?

What do you think are the implications for us personally, as individuals and families?

What do you think are the implications for us as a Catholic community?

Is there anything this discussion prompts us to do, especially in relation to the coming general election?

If you use the same questions each week, people will get used to thinking along these lines, and the method will be more effective. They may also be useful to the person introduces the sections being studied.

- Finish with a few minutes of evaluation; ask people to think what is the most valuable thing they have learned during this meeting. Then spend a few minutes in prayer.