



## Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

### Consultation on outline framework for proposed social teaching document from the Bishops of England and Wales

1. Catholic social teaching has often been described at the Church's best kept secret. Many Catholics, and indeed others too, may well be surprised to discover how over the centuries the Catholic Church has developed a body of teaching reflecting on the social dimension of the Gospel. Over the last century that teaching has been particularly developed through Papal teaching, and the teaching of the Bishops in different countries. This teaching is not an optional extra, but as the Catechism makes clear 'In so far as it is part of the Church's moral teaching, the Church's social doctrine has the same dignity and authority as her moral teaching. It is authentic Magisterium, which obligates the faithful to adhere to it' (# 2037).
2. In 1996 the Bishops of England and Wales produced *The Common Good* - a statement on Catholic social teaching and its application to some aspects of social and political life in England and Wales. Much has changed in culture and society in the decade since that document was written, and a number of new issues have emerged. At a point of such turmoil and change in the global economy and our society there is much to ponder and distill.
3. At the Bishops' Conference plenary meeting in November 2008 a decision was made to work on a new document reflecting on some salient aspects of life in England and Wales today in the light of Catholic social teaching. A working group of 7 bishops was formed to take forward this work. They are Archbishop Peter Smith, Archbishop Vincent Nichols, and Bishops Chris Budd, David McGough, Declan Lang, Michael Campbell and Malcolm McMahan. The group hope to complete their work by the autumn of 2009.
4. It is very likely that there will soon be a new papal encyclical on social teaching. Naturally in that event, the Bishops will be seeking to reflect on that new teaching and apply it appropriately to the situation in England and Wales.



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5. ***At this early stage, before any draft of the document is written, the Bishops on the working group are keen to hear from the consultative bodies of the Bishops' Conference, individuals and groups with particular expertise, and other interested parties. Such consultation is an important part of the process and any brief observations or comments on the possible content and structure would be welcome. The Bishops on the group are keen to listen, whilst of course in the end a document of this kind is of its nature a Bishops teaching document for which they alone carry responsibility.***
6. The foundation of the Church's social teaching is the dignity and worth of each and every human being. The Church rejects the idea that we are essentially isolated and self-sufficient individuals, owing nothing to and giving nothing to the social order. Rather the Church's teaching insists that we are essentially social beings – 'relational beings' – who would be less than recognisably human without our relationships with others. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the social conditions which are most suited to human flourishing, thriving and fulfilment. Because we live in one world and are increasingly interconnected and interdependent, getting those social conditions right is a universal concern. There is no 'I' who can live in full human dignity whilst ever there is 'another' on the face of the earth who suffers degradation. The very existence of such 'others', living in hardship and oppression tells us that social conditions are very wrong. Hence, our message has to be universal too.
7. On this foundation, Social Teaching articulates further principles about how all members of society can live together in a manner that promotes the flourishing of each. These are solidarity, subsidiarity and the common good, but these principles always need to be considered together.
8. It is the particular task of the lay faithful, living in society, to seek to apply the Gospel to the problems of the day, and to work in whatever way is open to them to transform the temporal order. It is particularly appropriate and important therefore that in seeking to reflect on, and present afresh some elements of Catholic social teaching as they apply to society in England and Wales today, that the Bishops should first listen and consult lay people.



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9. Attached to this note is a list which identifies a number of areas which the document could cover. No decisions have yet been made but the framework document gives an indication of the working group's thinking thus far. The Bishops have in mind to produce a relatively short and accessible document that is directed to an audience beyond as well as within the Catholic Community. The document will not be exhaustive. It will seek to present clearly the essence of Catholic social teaching and also its application to some – but only some – of the issues facing our society today. It will seek to do so in a way that makes clear that this teaching is an integral dimension of the Gospel message, which is always rooted and founded in a life of prayer. They will therefore be seeking to convey the spiritual core of the gospel message as the foundation and orientation of everything they say.
10. In the course of their work, the Bishops have in mind also to develop plans for the dissemination and discussion of the document when it is produced, with a view to enhancing the scope for debate and discussion.
11. Although the Bishops do not have it in mind to produce a second edition of the "Common Good" document, much of that document is still relevant. It also in its first part contains a succinct summary of the key principles of Catholic social teaching – the dignity of the person, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity. It can be read or downloaded from the Bishops Conference website at [http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/ccb/media/files/cbcew\\_publications/the\\_common\\_good\\_and\\_the\\_catholic\\_church\\_s\\_social\\_teaching](http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/ccb/media/files/cbcew_publications/the_common_good_and_the_catholic_church_s_social_teaching)
12. Some questions on which the working group bishops would welcome your comments and observations are these:
  - Do you have any general observations on the attached draft framework?
  - What is there in our present culture which is worthy of praise and support?
  - Do you have any specific comments on what is included or excluded in section 1 – setting the context?
  - Are there specific topics which you believe stand out as particularly important at this time for discussion in section 3, and if so why?
  - Do you have examples to suggest of witnesses for section 4?
  - Do you have practical suggestions to make about how to ensure the most effective dissemination and discussion of the document when it is produced?



## **Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales**

13. Please send your comments and observations either by post to:

**Archbishop Peter Smith  
Social teaching document consultation  
39, Eccleston Square  
London  
SW1V 1BX**

Or by e-mail to [CSTconsult@cbcew.org.uk](mailto:CSTconsult@cbcew.org.uk)

**Please ensure your views and comments are sent in by 30<sup>th</sup> April  
2009 at the latest.**

Archbishop Peter Smith  
Chairman, Bishops Working group  
March 2009



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## Outline draft framework

### 1. The current social and cultural context – possible areas to include

The fluidity of contemporary social structures.

The multicultural and multi-faith realities of contemporary society and its significance for the Catholic Church.

The significance of Human Rights.

Globalisation.

The significance of the media/communications in contemporary life.

The current financial crisis: the need for a moral 'ecology' of the markets.

Technological innovation: promise and reality.

The social and political significance of the new Terrorism.

Europe and inward migration: its social impact.

The changing meaning of family life and its pressures..

The future role of the voluntary sector, especially Catholic Charities.

New and emerging categories of vulnerability and marginalisation.

The environment and the quality of life.

Key issues in the public discourse:

- The individual and community: rights and responsibility.
- The democratic deficit.
- The erosion of trust in public institutions.
- The limits of autonomy and the nature of a liberal society.
- The changing position of religion in the public square



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## 2. The Theological Context

The theological basis of the social mission of the Church.

The Church's understanding of the relationship between rights and responsibilities grounded in the vision of the human person.

Key elements in the Church's vision of human flourishing: Love in Action.

- The universal destination of goods.
- The person and community - subsidiarity.
- The relationship between Love of God and Love of neighbour - solidarity.
- The significance of the 'Common Good' – its theological, political and social dimensions. The Distinction between the 'total Good' and the 'Common Good'. The reality of the Church – more than a social and political agency. The horizon of the Church's vision of the ultimate human good and human flourishing.

## 3. Possible topics

***The intention is to have select topics in this section. They would be explored in some detail and the resources of the Church's social teaching used to illuminate the issues and, where possible, suggest ways forward. Some of the features in section 1. might be candidates for this section. It would be useful to identify them and any additional topics you think should be addressed. Any brief rationale which could contribute to reflection and treatment would of the topics you propose would be welcome.***

## 4. This crowd of Witnesses

This section would look at contemporary examples of men and women, and organisations and communities whose life and work are inspired and sustained by the Gospel.

If you have any suggestions about the men or women to be included in this section they are welcome. If you do suggestion someone, it would be helpful to give reasons for your suggestion and also a brief introduction to their life and work.