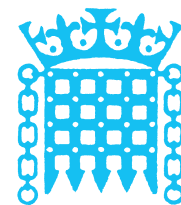


# Catholic Public Policy digest

promoting the common good in public life



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## news from Caritas-social action

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## Social Justice in 2006 - Towards a Dialogue with Parliamentarians

According to Pope Benedict XVI in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*:

'Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew' (S28)

Following the growing trend for episcopal conferences around the world to take up their own national social justice issues interpreting for their own churches what was once addressed by the papacy, the Catholic Church in England and Wales, through its domestic social justice agency, Caritas-social action, is planning a new document that will examine where we have got to with delivering a just society at home.

### The need for public theology

Inspired by Pope Benedict's encyclical which explained that the Church 'cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice', the Catholic Bishops in England and Wales plan to exercise the magisterial duty of their office, to render the gospel of Caritas more and more present by applying it to contemporary UK social justice concerns. Such a document, addressing both the Catholic community and policy and decision makers at large, will demonstrate how Catholic Social Teaching has updated itself in recent years since the publication of the Common Good in 1996.

The document will not involve completely new principles or ideas or seek to displace older teachings.

Rather it will witness to a shift of emphasis by the Bishops to prioritise social justice at home and in particular to highlight familiar domestic social justice concerns relating to families in need, vulnerable older people and adults with mental health problems. It is the task of "doing public theology" with the recognition that raising the consciousness of social injustices at a national level is a principal means to effect positive social change.

### The priorities of social justice

As Bishop Christopher Budd, vice chair of Caritas-social action, said at the launch of the initiative in Liverpool in March:

'As Pope Benedict made clear, 'the Church cannot neglect the service of charity anymore than she can neglect the Sacrament and the Word'. If charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore their political activity, the priority of social justice for the Church today cannot be overstated.'

### The reality

In the UK at present, although average incomes have been rising quickly, just under 1 in 4 people live in poverty and there is a growing inequality gap. Life is bleak for many in our apparently affluent society. We know for instance that children from poor homes are more likely to die as a baby, to have lower life expectancy, to suffer ill health, to be unemployed and are less likely to do well at school. Poverty casts a dark shadow over people's lives and their futures and robs them of their God-given dignity.

### A call for involvement

Recognising the distinctive natures and duties of the Church and State in meeting the myriad of social justice challenges that confront us today, Caritas-social action invites interested parliamentarians to work with them in the formulation of the social justice document. MP's and peers are asked to reflect on:

- What themes and principles do you think should guide the social justice document?
- What specific domestic policy concerns do you think should be represented in a Bishop's Conference Social Justice document?

This is a unique opportunity to jointly initiate a fresh debate about social justice in England and Wales and to speak up with, and for, those who are most powerless in our society today.

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## news from the Catholic Education Service (CES)

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### The Education and Inspections Bill

We welcome many of the educational provisions of the Bill, including the opportunities for further collaboration between schools and further education institutions, additional support for teachers in dealing with disruptive behaviour and the establishment of new nutritional standards for food and drink served in state schools. We also broadly welcome the important changes to the vocational curriculum, but are concerned that all young people – whatever their chosen subjects or route – should have access to high quality religious education and spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. We are far from convinced that the necessary safeguards to ensure this are yet in place.

Whilst the elements of the Bill which deal with structural reforms have been altered since the White Paper, we remain concerned that the changes are not sufficient to ensure that the reforms help the most economically and educationally disadvantaged in our society (the test which all parties have set for the reforms).

#### Diocesan role

The Bill does not sufficiently recognise the key strategic role which is played by Catholic dioceses, and the need to ensure they are adequately represented in local decision-making. The existence of School Organisation Committees acknowledged the fact that local authorities need to work collaboratively with dioceses and we are not yet confident that they will be adequately replaced. It is unclear how the Office of the Schools Commissioner will work in practice, and how the DfES will ensure that all officials receive adequate training.

#### Trust schools

There is a lack of clarity about some important technical aspects of how Trust schools will work, particularly around land transfer and assets. We accept the need for safeguards to ensure that Trusts are not able to benefit at public expense, but this must not endanger the rights of existing Trusts – in our case, the dioceses and religious orders.

### Access to Catholic schools

We welcome the Government's decision to ban schools from interviewing, but are concerned that the new Code does not permit a sufficient degree of freedom for admissions authorities to reflect the local situation in their decision-making. There have been a number of delays in publishing the revised Code of Practice. Ruth Kelly has promised that the "main contents of the admissions code will be there to be scrutinised ... during the Committee stage [of the Bill]". It is essential that the "main contents" are sufficient and explicit enough to allow schools and dioceses to form a view as to how they will affect current practice.

Whilst we welcome proposals to make the admissions process more transparent and easier for parents to manage, it will be important that choice advisers are well trained and an objective source of advice.

Additionally, the practical effects of the proposals on home-to-school transport are still unclear. In particular, we will be examining the transport offer to ensure it is sufficient to allow children from the poorest Catholic families to continue to attend Catholic schools. For many Catholic families, there is not a Catholic school within 6 miles.

### The response of the Catholic Church

The publication of the Bill – alongside the current faith schools debate – was a significant moment for education in this country, and the Bishops met together in a symposium to consider their response. Every diocese in England and Wales was represented. The Bishops were unanimous in their support for the continuation of voluntary aided schools and the freedoms this offers, e.g. curriculum time for RE, governance, and the ethos of the school. These would be proscribed as trust or foundation schools. The CES have also sought assurances that foundation status may not be sought without the agreement of existing trustees.

Bishops are, however, interested in exploring whether there is an additional contribution that we could make to helping the disadvantaged by working with other partners – e.g. other faith groups – to establish new types of schools on the trust/foundation model.

The CES will be writing to Catholic parliamentarians as the Bill progresses to update you on the Church's position and to seek your help as necessary.

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## news from the Secretariat of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

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### Assisted Suicide for the Terminally Ill Bill

The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has joined the Care not Killing Alliance, a new coalition bringing together disability rights groups, medical groups, faith groups and others. The purpose of this new Alliance is to promote more and better palliative care and to oppose any change in the law to allow assisted suicide or euthanasia.

The Care not Killing leaflet *Assisted Suicide* – what is happening in Parliament and what can I do about it? has been widely distributed to all Catholic parishes.

The leaflet can be seen on the Care not Killing Website:

<http://www.carenotkilling.org.uk>

For more information on the Conference's current activity:

[www.catholic-ew.org.uk/cnk/](http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/cnk/)

### Travellers

In November 2005, Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue, on behalf of the Department for Christian Responsibility & Citizenship, issued a statement calling the attention of Catholics to the plight of Gypsies and Travellers. 'The lack of secure and suitable accommodation' which 'gives rise to a number of other problems such as illness, unemployment and inadequate education for their children' was highlighted.

The Bishops noted the difficulties Travellers faced when the statutory duty on local authorities to provide sites was repealed and they called for the different issues relating to inadequate site provision to be urgently addressed.

This Statement is especially relevant in light of the recent Law Lords' judgment which upheld the right of Leeds City Council to evict a Traveller family from council owned land at Spinkwell Lane, near Wakefield.

### Review of Sunday Trading Legislation

The DTI has announced a Review of Sunday Trading Legislation which will consider the proposal for further liberalisation of Sunday Trading Laws. These include the Sunday Trading Act 1994, which allowed large shops to be open for six hours on Sunday, and subsequent legislation in 1996 and 2004, giving shop-workers the right to refuse to work on Sunday and prohibited large shops opening on Christmas Day. The Bishops are preparing a submission, which is likely to draw on the Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* of Pope John Paul II (1998) which dealt with the importance of Sunday for Catholics.

### Statement on Racial and Religious Hatred (CARJ)

In the wake of the publication of cartoons offensive to Muslims and the failure to prosecute successfully the BNP, the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) has called for a common effort to address hate crime and build mutual understanding. CARJ accepts that proposed legislation to address incitement to religious hatred was flawed, but says 'there are dangers in championing free speech to the point where it approaches an affirmation of a right to hate.' CARJ identifies four areas that should be given attention in the coming months: the possibility of drafting inclusive hate crime legislation alongside the proposed Single Equality Act should be explored; a new Commission for Integration & Cohesion should be supported; local churches and faith communities should act as bridge builders; faith schools should be a positive presence in segregated areas.

CARJ is an independent charity and an Agency of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales.

### Sexual Orientation Regulations (provision of goods, facilities, services and premises)

New regulations, prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods, facilities, services and premises, are due to come into force by summer 2006. Prior to this there will be a consultation on Draft Regulations. The Regulations themselves will be laid before Parliament, where they must be accepted or rejected without amendment. In preparing these regulations, the Government will have to balance the prohibition of discrimination in current EU legislation with the rights of conscience and religion in the Human Rights Act. The Catholic Bishops are on record as supporting non-discrimination legislation in this area. They will also want to ensure that Catholic tradition, theology and practice are protected and appropriate exemptions are included in the legislation.

### Ground of Justice Project

The Cardinal, the Archbishop of Southwark and the Bishop of Brentwood have joined London Citizens and the Von Hügel Institute to undertake a project in support of newly arrived immigrant communities in London. The project will be launched at a Mass at Westminster Cathedral on 1st May. It will include a research project by the Von Hügel Institute into the experience and needs of these communities. London Citizens will develop ways of supporting newly arrived immigrant communities with parishes, chaplaincies and agencies.



## news from CAFOD

The official development agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.  
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### International Development Bill

The International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Bill introduced to the House of Commons by Tom Clarke MP, has been amended in Standing Committee and is waiting to be re-considered by the House of Commons in its Third Reading on 12th May. The Bill aims to establish a requirement for the Government to lay an annual report before Parliament on its overseas aid spending, especially the 0.7% target. If it succeeds it will increase transparency and scrutiny enabling campaigners and MPs to hold the Government accountable by tracking the quantity and quality of aid given by the UK.

Tom Clarke MP, member of Parliamentary Friends of CAFOD (PFOC) worked with CAFOD and other NGOs urging MPs to attend the Second Reading in the Commons. Attendance was unusually high for a Friday, and the Bill passed through the second reading unopposed, receiving cross-party support. CAFOD, in conjunction with other NGOs, submitted amendments at Committee stage and is planning to address the issues raised in the amendments both in the Lords and in the final reading of the Bill.

Contact: Zoe Wildig, [zwildig@cafod.org.uk](mailto:zwildig@cafod.org.uk)

### Company Law Reform Bill

The Company Law Reform Bill, first introduced into the House of Lords and currently at Lord's Committee Stage is expected to arrive in the House of Commons at the end of April.

CAFOD is supporting the Corporate Responsibility (CORE) and Trade Justice Movement's call for amendments to be made to ensure:

- companies are legally required to report on their social and environmental impacts and performance;
- directors are legally obliged to minimise any damage their company does to local communities and the environment;

- people overseas affected by the activities of UK companies to have access to justice in the UK.

CAFOD believes companies who behave ethically are beneficial to local communities, and we advocate transparency and accountability concerning their activities.

Contact: Anne Lindsay, [alindsay@cafod.org.uk](mailto:alindsay@cafod.org.uk)

### International Development White Paper Progress

DFID is currently preparing a White Paper planned for the summer of 2006, as it is appropriate to reflect on the promises made in 2005 and how these are to be transformed into outcomes for poor countries. Issues include:

- governance in developing countries, ensuring effective delivery of aid for poor people;
- coherence on non-aid issues that affect development (e.g. climate change and migration)
- reforming the international development system to deliver better results and be more responsive to the needs of the poor.

CAFOD, as part of BOAG (British Overseas Aid Group) has been participating in discussions with Ministers and Civil Servants drafting the White Paper, and we are eager to encourage partners to participate in discussions to ensure the White Paper focus provides for the effective delivery of aid. Cafod has contributed individually to the consultation.

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### Nigerian Debt

In 2005, the Paris Club, backed by the IMF agreed to cancel £10 billion worth of Nigeria's international debts (two-thirds of its total debt). The UK Government, as Nigeria's biggest creditor will cancel £2.8 billion. This was welcomed by campaigners across the globe. In order for the cancellation to take place, Nigeria agreed to pay back £1.7 billion to the UK within six months (£1.7 billion is twice what UK Government gives to Africa in one year); the money would come from funds which had been earmarked for poverty reduction. CAFOD is supporting the Jubilee Debt Campaign which is lobbying the UK Government to return Nigeria's money, so that this vast sum can be invested in poverty reduction.

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