

The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1996

Part I: 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 II: 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=8A" (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 per cent 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.

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 like-minded citizens of every political and religious allegiance.