

**MEETING OF CIDSE
(INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING BODY FOR CATHOLIC AID AGENCIES)**

MASS ON FEAST OF ST THOMAS MORE, PATRON OF STATESMEN

MONDAY 23RD JUNE 2008

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

INTRODUCTION:

First of all I welcome you most warmly to Scotland as Directors of CIDSE, that 'International Working Group for Socio-Economic Development'. I extend a particular welcome to the ecclesiastical advisor of CIDSE, Bishop Charrier, the Emeritus Bishop of Alessandria in Italy – along also with members of staff of SCIAF and other volunteers.

The Feast of St Thomas More and St John Fisher was celebrated yesterday but I think it appropriate as we gather today to commemorate the life and work of St Thomas More proclaimed by Pope John Paul II as Patron Saint of Statesmen.

I say just a few words about St Thomas More himself who was born in London in 1478, became a prominent lawyer, a member of parliament, and a well respected judge before becoming Lord Chancellor of England at the age of 52. He resigned from that office on 16th May 1532 after King Henry VIII manipulated both Parliament and the Convocation of Clergy in order to assume control over the Church in England. He was eventually imprisoned for fifteen months before being tried and executed for not signing an oath that recognised the King's supremacy in spiritual affairs. His famous last words: "**I die the King's good servant and God's first**", remain an inspiration for all those who dedicate their lives to the service of the common good. Among those who make such a dedication I include all of you present here today especially those linked with aid agencies in your own countries and gathered here as members of CIDSE.

HISTORY OF CIDSE:

The idea for a coordinating body for Catholic aid agencies was first raised at the Eucharistic Congress in Munich in 1960 and was taken up again at the Second Vatican Council in 1964. CIDSE was formerly created in September 1967; and its fifteen member organisations are inspired by the social teaching of the Church – in particular the two encyclicals on development "Populorum Progressio and "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis".

In recent years, CIDSE work has focussed almost exclusively on advocacy. It has concentrated on key issues concerning our world such as debt, EU development policy, financing for development, security and development, trade and food security.

The teaching of the Church at the Vatican Council has been an inspiration to all its members as also the teaching of the Popes especially recently Pope John Paul II. It was the late Pope who in his letter on the beginning of the new Millennium in 1984 wrote:

“Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reduce substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations”.

AID AGENCIES IN EUROPE – ESPECIALLY SCOTLAND:

I would presume that in most of your countries the birth of your agencies took place either shortly before or around the time of the Second Vatican Council. You rightly wanted to work evermore closely together and coordinate your apostolate so that your voice for those in need throughout the world would be all the more powerful. It is wonderful to realise that in October 2007 around 160 people from virtually all comers of the world came together in the Netherlands to celebrate and review the 40th anniversary of the Papal Encyclical “Populorum Progressio”.

Here in Scotland our own aid agency, **Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF)** found its birth at that time – along with the formation of our **National Commission for Justice & Peace**.

There has been an amazing development in the apostolate of these agencies over the past forty years and I am more than happy now as President of the Bishops Conference of Scotland to be a Director of SCIAF and work closely with our Justice & Peace Commission.

Having had a great interest of the missionary work of the Church before and during my early life as a priest that interest has developed into all aspects of the justice work of the Church as exemplified through the apostolate of SCIAF and our Justice & Peace Commission. Initially I volunteered to work in Bauchi State of Northern Nigeria with other priests of our Archdiocese – but did not manage to visit there until my ordination as a Bishop. As a young Bishop I was inspired by the apostolate of a number of our priests working in Central America especially in El Salvador and this, on my Bishop’s Staff sums up these initial two interests having carved on one side the name of “Bauchi” while on the other the name of “Chalatenango” the diocese formed from the Archdiocese of San Salvador while our priests were working there.

Since my creation as Cardinal in 2003 it has been my privilege as a Director of SCIAF to travel with Paul Chitnis our Chief Executive to various areas in the world to which we had been invited or where we thought our apostolate representing the apostolate of SCIAF would be appreciated. Consequently over the past few years we have visited together: Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Darfur, various parts of India, Cambodia, and we hope to be in Myanmar in January of this coming year.

My vestment signifies something of my travels with this Ethiopian vestment and Cambodian Cross!

In Scotland we had the privilege of hosting the G8 Summit in Gleneagles in 2005 prior to which along with Paul Chitnis, the Chief Executive of SCIAF, and various Cardinals and Bishops and other CIDSE representatives we engaged in a **lobbying tour**; as also before the G8 in Germany in 2007. I think that our delegations under the aegis of CIDSE, demonstrated the Catholic Church’s abiding concern for justice and peace recognising, as Pope Paul VI said in 1967, “Development is the new name for peace”.

On the wider field of justice I have followed the lead of earlier Bishops of Scotland in campaigning actively **against the renewal of the Trident Nuclear Warhead System based here in Scotland**. This has also given me the opportunity of ecumenical contact as well as contact with leaders of other faiths.

And on the wider front of morality I have had the opportunity of speaking out widely on **moral issues affecting our Church and our country as a whole** – having only recently returned from speaking at the House of Commons in Westminster both at Mass and at a reception which I hosted; and on 1st July I will be at the Holyrood Parliament along with the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and Imam Ruzwan of the Muslim faith on the vitally important subject of **climate change**.

QUESTIONS FOR OURSELVES:

However I know that on this occasion we are not gathered just for self congratulation or even congratulating others.

When Pope Benedict XVI has recently spoken very eloquently about “hope” in his encyclical of 2007 we must consider just **how we are living at this present time and what are the sources of our hope**.

I put three questions to you today – as we think of St Thomas More who spoke truth to power. He was murdered because he “opposed the attempt of power to command the conscience”. **We must be considering what is the martyrdom to which we are called as members of the Church and you yourselves in particular ways as directors of CIDSE and its member organisations.**

1. Firstly I would ask you to think with me of our own lifestyles at this present time.

We call others to “live simply that others might simply live”. We must consider just how authentic we are in terms of being a witness to our faith. We must think as to how our own personal faith experience impact on the ways in which we are members of our organisations and in the ways in which we influence others. Are we recognised as “spiritual” people, as those who set aside time to nourish a personal relationship with God – and do we encourage those working with us and for us to that same high ideal. Perhaps also we should be considering whether or not our knowledge of the faith and of the Church’s teaching is as completely up-to-date as it should be – as we are the people to who others will turn for help and advice. Perhaps we should also be considering just what is the right relationship between our work and our prayer. It is not that work is all important and prayer helps; but rather our lives of prayer are all important and our good works flow from our lives of prayer.

2. The faith of CIDSE:

CIDSE has from its earliest days been a **Catholic network which has sought to have a distinctive voice within the Church**. It is no accident that its secretariat was located in Brussels and not in Rome. Our aid agencies must appreciate the power of their presence in each country where they are; and the agencies as individual agencies and as a whole must have a **bold and courageous vision for the future**.

If we can say with regard to our lifestyle that the right relationship between our work and prayer is not that our work is all important and prayer helps it – but rather that our lives of prayer are all important and our good work flows from our lives of prayer then we must also say something similar with regard to our aid agencies.

We are all involved in the **apostolate of charity and of justice**. Do we have the right relationship there? Is it not sometimes rather easy to appeal to our people for charitable gifts for those whom we are trying to help, rather than to make a stance on behalf of justice in so many countries in the world in which there is injustice? Can we not consider **what the right relationship is between charity and justice; is it that charity is all important and justice helps or is it that justice is all important and our charitable works flow from the creation of justice?** I would suggest the latter to you?

3. Relationships with other faiths:

In countries where I have been there is often an excellent relationship between those of the Christian faith and those of other faiths. I remember on arriving in Darfur I was initially welcomed by the Sudan Council of Christian Churches – but received an almost greater welcome from the leading Imams who had gathered to greet me and to listen to me. The same has been obvious in other parts of the world which I have visited.

I ask whether or not the members of CIDSE have considered **the role they could and should play in interfaith work**. In the same way that CIDSE has provided leadership within the Church on its understanding of development, its willingness to lobby politicians, and to articulate a strong clear vision inspired by social teaching, I ask **whether or not CIDSE could do more directly to bring together people from other faiths around issues which concern us all**. In this particular area, I mention major issues such as nuclear disarmament and climate change, as well as important issues of local concern.

CONCLUSION:

I think that the members of CIDSE and certainly the Directors of CIDSE must never sit back and allow others to dictate the pace at which they work. **Our aid agencies were created to be a prophetic voice – a prophetic voice which must make itself heard loudly and clearly in our Church at this present time.**

Going back to our patron saint of today, St Thomas More, **nothing would silence him in his speaking out for justice in the England of his time.**

The same must be true of us as we continue to speak out loudly and clearly for those who have no voice but ours to speak out for them here in Scotland and throughout the world.

We must think of that call to open and fearless speech by Jesus himself as we have just heard in today's Gospel reading: "Do not be afraid of them therefore. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the house tops!"

May God indeed bless you all in your valued apostolates and inspire you as you gather together here in our country.