

# RESTORING FAITH IN POLITICS

GENERAL ELECTION 2010



THE CATHOLIC UNION  
*of Great Britain*

(c) The Catholic Union of Great Britain  
First published in 2010

Artwork designed by Pawel Starzak

Published by the Catholic Union of Great Britain,  
St Maximilian Kolbe House, 63 Jeddo Road, London W12 9EE,  
tel: 020 8749 1321, email: [info@catholicunion.org](mailto:info@catholicunion.org), [www.catholicunion.org](http://www.catholicunion.org)

Printed by Spotcolour, tel. 020 8903 9418

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form (including photocopying or storing it in any medium by electronic means and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright owner except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, England, EC1N 8TS, tel: 020 7299 7730, fax: 020 7299 7780, email: [pls@pls.org.uk](mailto:pls@pls.org.uk). Applications for the copyright owner's written permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to the publisher.

# RESTORING FAITH IN POLITICS

GENERAL ELECTION 2010



THE CATHOLIC UNION  
*of Great Britain*

The Catholic Union of Great Britain,  
St Maximilian Kolbe House, 63 Jeddo Road, London W12 9EE  
tel: 020 8749 1321, email: [info@catholicunion.org](mailto:info@catholicunion.org)  
[www.catholicunion.org](http://www.catholicunion.org)



The Catholic Union Of Great Britain

## **RESTORING FAITH IN POLITICS: GENERAL ELECTION 2010**

*Can Faith In Politics Be Restored?*

### **A GENERAL ELECTION – TIME FOR REFLECTION**

A General Election is an important time in the life of a democratic country.

All of us should consider carefully what options for voting are open to us, what the political parties are offering and what sort of society we would like to live in.

It is a time for reflection and careful consideration of the public policy issues that most impinge upon the common welfare and the common good of us all.

Polling results indicate that this election could be close run. Christian citizens have a duty to vote and on the whole, they will do so. For many Parliamentary candidates the votes of members of faith communities may well be decisive.

This provides us with an opportunity to question candidates about their beliefs and, more importantly, their past voting record or future voting promises.

It is the actions of governments and parliamentarians that count, not merely their views, however sympathetically expressed.

In recent years numerous policy initiatives have impacted upon the Catholic community and other faith communities very markedly.

Equality legislation, whatever good intentions may have been the motivation, has, for example, led to the closure of Catholic children's societies and adoption agencies or to their transfer into secular hands.

Catholic schools have been restricted in their manner of admission of pupils to the detriment of Catholic families who thereby found themselves excluded from the Catholic school system, in some cases.

Legislation was even proposed to cap the proportion of Catholics in the Catholic school system.

Proposals have been introduced to impose school sex education in schools which may include informing children about how to access abortion services.

Other legislation has sometimes been interpreted as preventing Christians from wearing their symbols of faith or exercising conscientious objection on the grounds of religion in the workplace and elsewhere.

New laws have been introduced which have tended to undermine respect for human life, including that of the elderly and infirm. Attempts have been made to legalise assisted suicide and forms of euthanasia.

We have seen significant and wide ranging changes made to our Constitution and sometimes radical inroads into some of our long cherished and much valued constitutional rights.

Many changes have not featured in election manifestos. Significant legislation may reach the statute book without being put before the electorate in any election manifesto.

This means that electors need to read between the lines of what the various political parties are proposing as their policies.

The relationship of trust between voter and politician has, in recent times, been significantly undermined by the notoriety surrounding the issue of expenses claimed by politicians.

The social compact between the governed and those governing has been significantly weakened by various scandals including politicians seeking “cash for influence”.

Many voters are now looking for material evidence of a commitment to transparency, honesty and integrity from prospective candidates.

Religious belief has, in recent times, ascended the political agenda. Without it becoming necessarily a party-political issue, it has moved to the forefront in many policy areas.

There are even some who seem to wish to reduce those with religious faith into second-class citizens by denying them the right to act in accordance with those beliefs.

Yet we have inherited a remarkably rich tradition of religious faith that has formed the basis of our laws, customs and culture.

This Judaeo-Christian tradition has given us most of the enduring landmarks in our nation: from hospitals and universities, churches and Cathedrals, public education, the foundations of modern nursing and medicine, our legal and judicial system, our formidable tradition of voluntary and charitable service, the basis of our architecture and the layout of our cities and towns, to our Parliament and Crown.

Moreover, it is precisely this religious tradition which has given us the ability to respect the cultural traditions of others and that respect may well dissolve if our own heritage is abandoned or lost.

Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights protecting freedom of thought, conscience and religion arises out of this tradition, as do most of the other human rights and freedoms contained in that Convention.

As Christians we are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves. From this great commandment comes our sense of duty to others including those of different cultures and traditions. Love for one’s country is thus a value to be fostered, not with narrow-mindedness, self-exaltation, racism or xenophobia but with a love for the whole human family. We are unlikely to respect others if we do not respect ourselves and our own traditions.

As a voter and a member of a democratic society, we have nothing to fear from putting our views forward. Candidates who want our vote must be willing to respect our contribution to society and to respect our right to religious liberty.

We must be willing to challenge those politicians and parties who are not prepared to respect religious freedom and the freedom for Christians to participate fully in civil society without discrimination or unjust restriction.

## THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TEACHINGS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The social and political teachings of the Catholic Church are centred upon the unique dignity of the human person and of the social solidarity of each person within society.

The social doctrine of the Catholic Church favours neither collectivist socialism nor unrestricted capitalism. Neither does it favour some "Third Way" which attempts to marry both collectivist socialism and unrestricted capitalism.

Catholic teaching, like that of many other faiths and belief systems, favours that unique community which is sufficiently small to recognise and respect the dignity of every individual within it. That unique community is called the family.

Society does not consist purely of groups and individuals. It consists of families and most people are members of a family. This is fundamental to any society.

Without the family society and government face an impossible task in replacing it. The breakdown of the family is already costing the nation such a vast sum in resources that the Exchequer can no longer sustain the burden.

Any political party that refuses to face this issue can have little hope of facing its immense social consequences.

If we as a society, and our politicians in government, are serious about protecting people from poverty, hunger, illiteracy, under-development, crime and economic, social and spiritual misdevelopment, then we should make the protection of the family one of our principal priorities.

In reality, tax, matrimonial law, social welfare law and other legislation has tended to prejudice and undermine the family rather than nurture it. The result has been an increase in social exclusion and a decline in social inclusion and cohesion.

## THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE

The first duty of every government is to protect human life. It is contradictory to seek to promote human solidarity, welfare and the common good while failing to protect human life.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has this to say on the subject<sup>1</sup>:

*"no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being"*

Abortion and euthanasia, whether by act or omission, threaten the life of the vulnerable.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has this to say on the subject<sup>2</sup>:

*"Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible"*

---

<sup>1</sup> CCC 2258.

<sup>2</sup> CCC 2276.

The right to life is universally recognised as the primary fundamental right. It is reflected in all major charters of human rights and legal codes.

Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms protects the right to life and is accordingly the first substantial human right of the Convention. It states:

*“Everyone’s right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be intentionally deprived of his life save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction for a crime for which the penalty is provided by law”.*

Without the protection of the right to life, other rights disappear.

With an ageing population, and a greater use of medical resources by the elderly and infirm, has come an unhealthy debate about restricting such resources and about economic arguments for shortening the lives of the terminally or chronically ill.

This has gone hand-in-hand with a spate of reports about the abuse and mistreatment of the elderly and infirm in our hospitals and caring institutions.

This is a bleak prospect for us all since none of us can escape the inevitable fact of ageing.

Once the unique and fundamental value of human life is compromised in one part of the spectrum it is compromised in all parts.

Voters ought closely to examine the record of each party on these issues and satisfy themselves which party or parties have best protected human life.

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

The threat to human communities represented by the decline and fragmentation of the family poses one of the greatest long-term challenges facing Western society and has been estimated to cost the UK over £20 billion per annum.

Recently, a High Court judge of the Family Division of the High Court, Mr Justice Paul Coleridge, commented on the damage done by family breakdown and described it as "an epidemic".

Research shows that the majority of cohabiting partnerships are less stable than marriage, that dysfunction in families can be transmitted to the next generation, and that crime is strongly correlated with family breakdown.

Conversely, polls still strongly indicate that the public still thinks that support should be given for marriage in the tax and benefit system, that children are better off when cared for by their parents, and that marriage deserves more public support.

Research overwhelmingly favours marriage as the safest environment for the nurturing and upbringing of children.

These benefits accrue not only to the better off but, even more so, to poor, marginalised and minority groups.

If society and government are really serious about the best interests of children they should make protection of the family an immediate policy priority.

Furthermore, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it<sup>3</sup>:

*“Following the principle of subsidiarity, larger communities should take care not to usurp the family’s prerogatives or interfere in its life”*

This means removing laws that undermine and prejudice family life within the divorce and matrimonial courts, tax laws and social welfare provision, and access to affordable housing and family friendly employment policies.

The education of children in matters of human sexuality is a delicate subject where parents must always have the primary responsibility. Their role should not be usurped but rather sensitively supported. Education in human sexuality must be taught in the context of love, marriage and family life, social development and personal responsibility. It should not be used to promote under-age sexual experimentation. Still less should it be an occasion to present to children images that in any other context would be regarded as inappropriate or even abusive.

Voters ought closely to examine the record of each party on these issues and satisfy themselves which party or parties have best protected marriage and family life.

## INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

When we today proclaim the rights of poorer people in less developed countries against those of richer countries we speak with the same prophetic voice as that of the early Church which condemned the immoral use of money and the power it brings.

Christians are not opposed to the accumulation of private wealth and possessions. However, they do claim that this should be done by fair and just means and that the rich man goes on to use his wealth and power for good and not for evil purposes.

The Catechism also speaks<sup>4</sup> of the right to private property, the universal destination of goods, justice, solidarity, the evil of theft in all its forms, the need to keep promises and contracts, and commutative justice upon which all other justice is based.

It speaks of reparation for injustice, against the enslavement of human beings, of respecting the integrity of creation, of the importance of human work, of the right to economic initiative, of the good of persons alongside profit, of access to employment, of the just wage, and of the evil of unemployment.

It also speaks of the need for solidarity with the poor and of works of mercy to relieve human misery and suffering.

These are all matters upon which political parties or candidates can be judged.

Refugees have a particular claim on the international conscience and must be given shelter and protection, especially in time of war and famine. Immigrants must always be treated with the respect due to the dignity of every human person.

It is also a matter of international responsibility that our government join with others to tackle international evils like slavery, human trafficking, the abuse of children, the denial of human rights and the suppression of religious liberty.

<sup>3</sup> CCC 2209.

<sup>4</sup> CCC 2401-2449.

## ISSUES AND QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

We suggest a check-list of issues and questions which you may find helpful when you are seeking the views of parties and candidates in the run-up to this General Election:

1. Does your party's record demonstrate policies to protect human life?
2. Does your party's record demonstrate policies to protect marriage and family life?
3. Does your party's record demonstrate policies to protect justice for the elderly and for the poor?
4. Does your party's record demonstrate policies to protect religious freedom and particularly the freedom to follow one's religious conscience as a Catholic and a Christian? This includes following one's conscience in
  - a) Church schools
  - b) The workplace
  - c) Public Life

and not to be discriminated against for holding such views including views on sexual ethics.

5. Does your party's record demonstrate policies to promote and protect probity in public life?
6. Does your party's record demonstrate policies to promote international responsibilities?

## FURTHER SUGGESTIONS

When speaking with candidates it is important not to be fobbed off with generalities, nor are the private beliefs of individual candidates necessarily important.

What is important however is:

- a) How they have voted in the past. You can check their voting records by checking Hansard or by consulting relevant organisations or websites.
- b) How they will vote on issues in future. If they have voted adversely in the past then it will not be enough for them to give bland assurances now.

It is also important to distinguish between their party's policy, which will usually bind them, and how they will vote if given the chance to have a conscience or free vote.

Below is a list of further specific questions, which you may wish to pose in these terms or using your own words:

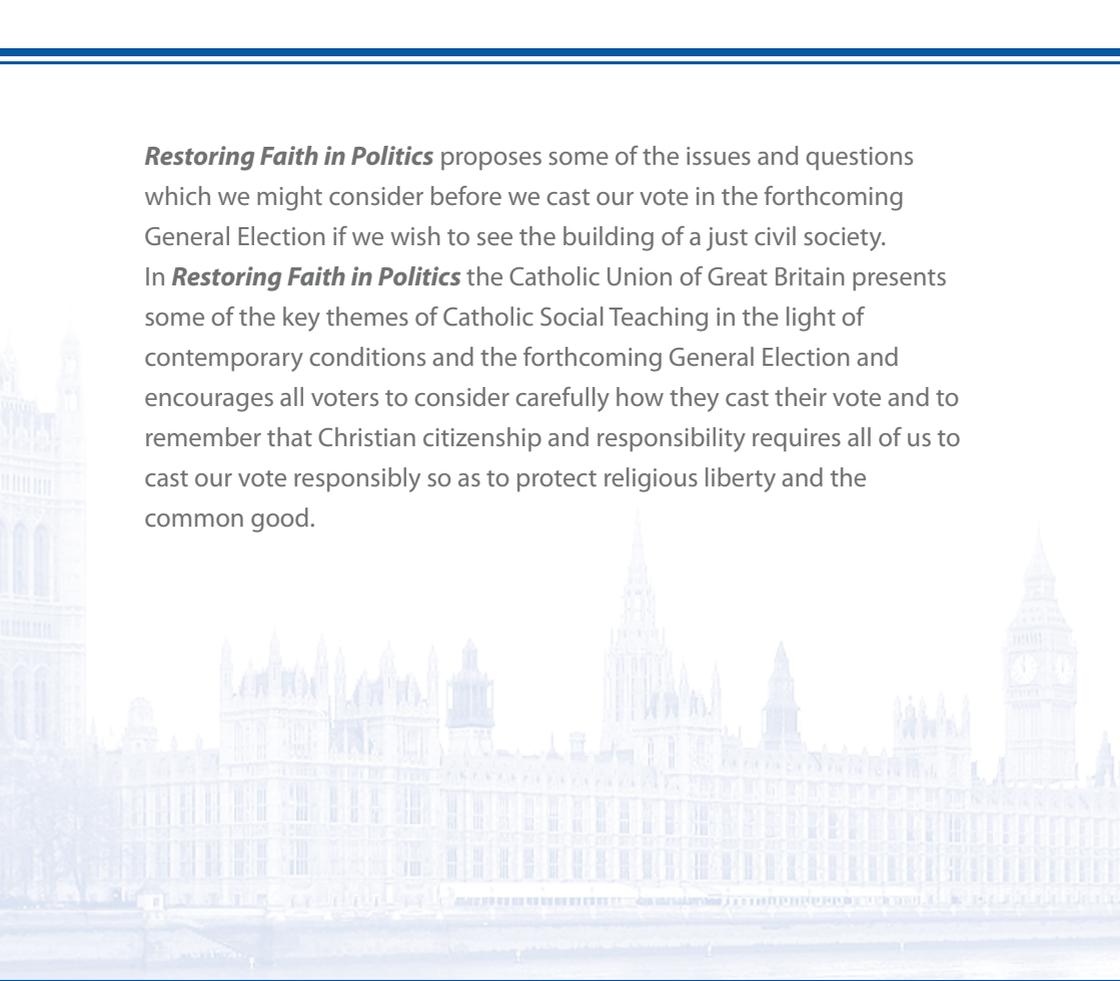
1. What is your party's policy on assisted suicide? Would you vote for legalising assisted suicide?
2. Does your party support marriage and family life? Do you mean by that, the legal marriage of a man and a woman, ideally for life? Would you vote to remove legal, fiscal and tax disincentives that discriminate against marriage? What financial measures would you

propose to promote and support marriage and family life? Would you promote civil partnerships as equal to marriage in law?

3. Given our ageing population, how will you or your party help the elderly and infirm? Do you believe in rationing healthcare by age? Do you believe in permitting the deliberate termination of the life of the terminally ill?
4. What will you or your party have to offer the long-term unemployed? What will your party do about those who have never been employed and are totally dependent on benefits?
5. Do you believe in religious liberty? Will you support and promote the right of Christians and Catholics to act in accordance with their beliefs? Will you protect the right of Catholics in the work-place to conscientious objection in relation to withdrawing from abortion, euthanasia or assisted suicide procedures, withdrawing from the provision of, or assistance at, same-sex marriage, wearing signs and symbols of their faith like cross, rings etc and expressing their views without fear of discrimination, prejudice or bullying? What is your attitude to the suspension of a Christian health-care worker who offered to pray for a patient? Will you work to prevent such unfair and unjust discrimination?
6. Do you accept that parents have the right to insist that their children be taught according to their own religious and sexual ethics?
7. What policies do you support which will restore the impairment of trust between the governed and those governing? How can politicians become more accountable to those whom they are meant to represent?
8. ONS statistics show that over two thirds of the population identify themselves as Christian. Do you accept that Christianity is therefore still of major significance in the life of the nation?
9. Why should a Catholic vote for you?

April 2010





***Restoring Faith in Politics*** proposes some of the issues and questions which we might consider before we cast our vote in the forthcoming General Election if we wish to see the building of a just civil society. In ***Restoring Faith in Politics*** the Catholic Union of Great Britain presents some of the key themes of Catholic Social Teaching in the light of contemporary conditions and the forthcoming General Election and encourages all voters to consider carefully how they cast their vote and to remember that Christian citizenship and responsibility requires all of us to cast our vote responsibly so as to protect religious liberty and the common good.

**The Catholic Union of Great Britain**

St Maximillian Kolbe House

63 Jeddo Road

London W12 9EE

Tel: 020 8749 1321

e-mail: [info@catholicunion.org](mailto:info@catholicunion.org)

[www.catholicunion.org](http://www.catholicunion.org)