



Caritas-krisen: en kommentar



Som omtalt i pressen og i Katolsk Orientering har Vatikanet forhindret, at Lesley-Anne Knight blev genvalgt som generalsekretær for Caritas Internationalis. Det skete imod de delegeredes ønsker, og var reelt en fyring. Årsagen skulle angiveligt være, at paven ønsker at give Caritas en mere katolsk profil. Det engelske ugeblad The Tablet har denne lederkommentar til fyringen, der har vakt voldsom røre internationalt, for dr. Knight var en meget erfaren, dygtig og effektiv leder.

I teksten nævnes Cafod og Cor Unum. Det første er en forkortelse for Catholic Agency For Overseas Development og er den katolske kirke i England og Wales' officielle nødhjælpsorganisation, det andet, der betyder "Ét hjerte", er navnet på det pavelige råd for menneskelig og kristen udvikling (oprettet 1971).

Kaare Rübner Jørgensen



Editorial

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Caritas' distinct role

Not for the first time, Caritas Internationalis, the second-largest humanitarian relief agency in the world after the Red Cross, has been going through a rough patch in its relations with the Vatican. This has resulted in the demoralising departure of its secretary general, Dr Lesley-Anne Knight, the renewal of whose four-year contract was blocked by Vatican officials.

There appear to be three elements at work: a turf war between Caritas and the Vatican department which deals with charitable activity, Cor Unum; a personality conflict, in that Dr Knight and Vatican officialdom have clearly failed to forge a good working relationship; and a difference of emphasis over policy, which has brought to light the Vatican's wish that



Catholic relief and development agencies should develop a stronger Catholic identity. There is little evidence to support a rumour on the internet that Dr Knight's real offence was to stand up for the Caritas-affiliated agency in Canada, which pro-life campaigners in North America had accused of being soft on abortion. If that was the issue, it would surely have been handled differently.

Dr Knight, a former senior official at Cafod's headquarters in London, was likely to have been re-elected unopposed had she been allowed to stand. The recently re-elected president of Caritas, Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, has spoken out strongly in her defence. Her successor, Michel Roy, who headed France's Caritas affiliate, Secours Catholique, shows no sign that he disagrees with her approach. But the Vatican will press on with its intention to reform Caritas' constitution and create a "new profile", in the words of one official.

What this means is quite hazy, but it seems to refer to the wish that Caritas be seen to be clearly under the Holy See's control. There are two key ideas in tension here: the need to preserve Caritas' professionalism, and the need to incorporate it as part of the Church's core activity, so that it is a vehicle not just of Christian charity but also of evangelisation. But professionals will not take kindly to being dictated to; nor do they see themselves simply as missionaries. Nevertheless, their professionalism has to be suffused with Catholic spirituality if Caritas is to be distinct in what it does.

Withholding its support for her re-election was probably the least brutal way the Vatican could find to bring about Dr Knight's replacement. In Dr Knight's account, in her four years in Rome the Vatican itself did very little to foster a good relationship with her. The Vatican, if it were being more open about this affair, might well say the same in return. But the standard Vatican approach to public relations – never explain, never apologise – seems to apply in this case too. Therein lies the danger.

To try to coerce Caritas and its 165 international affiliates into a change of ethos without first persuading them that the change is necessary – or even saying clearly what it involves – could easily end in failure and dissension. That could damage or destroy a network which, through its brave and tireless work for the relief of suffering and poverty, brings the Catholic Church great credit all over the world. That is itself an expression of the Gospel, a powerful instrument of evangelisation. In any reform, preserving that must be the starting point.