

DODGE

Good morning. I have no idea how many letters must be received each day by the government but I do know that there will be letters arriving today written by national church leaders. The letters contain an urgent plea for action on tax dodging by major companies which result in enormous sums of money being lost.

The charity Christian Aid estimates that tax dodging and evasion by some unscrupulous multinational companies costs developing countries at least 160 billion dollars a year, a figure one and a half times the global aid budget. And of course it means that there's less money to be shared here in Britain too where poverty is on the rise.

Much attention recently has been on the new welfare reforms. There's concern that some of these measures are unfair, that some parts of the legislation have not been properly thought through and, (perhaps most worryingly of all), that the already poor will simply be poorer than ever.

I'm sure the government could counter that much money is lost here too – that the existing welfare system is inefficient and cumbersome, and that there are too many loopholes for claimants to exploit.

Many years ago the prophets in the Hebrew Bible used to teach that whenever people and societies fail to care about justice, they move away from God, who's concerned about all of life.

Now whether we believe in God or belong to any faith group, I reckon that most people would agree that an unjust society – an unfair society - is neither healthy nor desirable.

Any government seeking the good of the country must be seen to be even-handed in its dealings.

I certainly hope that the government is prepared to take action against the giant businesses that seek to avoid their tax obligations.

On the other hand, we must recognise, that responsibility for a just and moral society must fall to all of us and not simply our elected representatives. Maybe the churches would also do well to write to the companies themselves to hold them to account.

Those faceless executives in multinational boardrooms are ordinary men and women who need to behave responsibly and act morally and honestly, as do the unemployed as they queue up to apply for benefits and support.

And as do we all, you and me included, if we want to live in a nation that is just and fair.

David McLachlan 1 February 2013