

Debate rages in Britain about how to tackle problems

Hundreds mourn murdered child

LIVERPOOL, England (CNS) — As murdered 2-year-old James Bulger was buried in an emotional Catholic funeral that drew hundreds of weeping mourners, debate raged about how to tackle the problems highlighted by the case.

The tiny body of the Liverpool child whose murder shocked and sickened the country was laid to rest in his home city amid scenes of mass mourning, but some saw a ray of hope in the strong reaction to his death.

Father Michael O'Connell, who celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial at Sacred Heart Catholic Church March 1, said the widespread feelings of revulsion at the murder, prompting calls for social change, gave some meaning to what appeared a senseless act.

"The death of an innocent little child is causing us to do something about it,

to make life better," said Father O'Connell. "His death was not in vain ... something in James Patrick touched the whole world."

"A single searing moment has shocked the nation," said Britain's chief rabbi, Johnathan Sachs, after the funeral. "If we can capitalize on this moment and create some initiative, then this moment will not be wasted."

The boy's badly battered body was found in mid-February after he was separated from his mother in a shopping mall and led away by two youths.

The murder, for which two 10-year-old boys have been arrested, stunned Britain into a new awareness of violent crime and has become a symbol of the dangers of social decay in communities blighted by recession.

The parents, Denise, 25, and Ralph, 26, chose one of their son's favorite songs, "Heal the World" by Michael Jackson, to reinforce a message of hope. Also played was "Tears in Heaven," a song written by rock star Eric Clapton about the accidental death of his own son.



AP/Wide World Photos
Two-year-old James Bulger was buried in Liverpool, England, March 1. Hundreds of mourners, including police officers who hunted his killers, said goodbye to the boy, who was found dead two days after wandering away from his mother in a shopping center on Feb. 12.

Cars in the funeral procession were piled high with wreaths, some in the shapes of toys and teddy bears.

The child's death has prompted national soul-searching about the rising tide of crime in a country that once saw itself as setting an example of courtesy to the world.

Cardinal George Basil Hume of Westminster, England, called for the government to order a royal commission to focus efforts to find the roots of the social malaise.

"You always condemn what is wrong, but we also have to understand why it happens," he said in a British television interview.

Prime Minister John Major, promising a moral crusade in the wake of the killing, said society should stop finding excuses for crime and condemn it more.

Archbishop George Carey of Canterbury, Britain's Anglican leader, said he believed the horror of the child's death raised questions about the moral malaise of the nation and said, "We must change this culture of violence."

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