

faith **in Europe**

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Whither (Whether) Brexit?

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Editorial

Faith in Europe, the Referendum and the Implications of Brexit

Philip Walters
27 February 2018

Faith in Europe involvement since 2014

In the autumn of 2014 the Committee of Faith in Europe (FiE) started discussing what strategy FiE should adopt to raise awareness among faith communities and the public more generally about the issues involved in the debate on the future of the United Kingdom in the European Union. Our discussions became more focused after David Cameron was reelected as Prime Minister in May 2015 and began renegotiating the terms of the UK's EU membership.

After the date of the Referendum was announced in February 2016, FiE had conversations with the European Movement (EM), and we decided that we would cooperate with the project 'Communities for Europe' which was being coordinated by Anuja Prashar of the EM. The aim of the project was to encourage and coordinate Referendum-related meetings in all parts of the UK organised by local communities (ethnic, women's, LGBT, and also faith) and to provide resources and speakers for them. Several members of FiE were at the launch of this project on 16 March 2016. John Arnold, one of the Vice-Presidents of Faith in Europe, was one of the keynote speakers, in his personal capacity, and his contribution has been widely appreciated. We are publishing it in this issue of *Faith in Europe Briefings*, in the form in which John presented it at our latest Briefing Meeting in January 2018.

Between March and June 2016 members of FiE were involved in their personal capacity in a wide range of hustings and other kinds of meetings arranged under various auspices in all parts of the UK, and added their names to letters published in the national press. We also maintained constant contact and cooperation with CTBI, CTE, CYTUN, ACTS and the Church of Scotland in their Referendum-related activity, including posting relevant material on their websites. (The Church of Scotland was the only church or ecumenical body to have specifically come out in support of the Remain cause). We opened a section on our own website and invited continuing discussion on our Facebook page.

In the light of the result of the Referendum on 23 June 2016, in which 52% of those who voted opted for the UK to leave the EU, at our AGM in July FiE's Moderator David Thomas gave a summary of the history of FiE and its predecessor bodies and reflected on its role in the future. At our various meetings later that year and in 2017 we regularly came back to this theme. Our prevailing view was that in many ways the work of FiE was just beginning and needed to concentrate on strengthening cultural, educational and ecumenical relationships across Europe; we might place emphasis on the Council of Europe, from which there was no suggestion of British withdrawal.

At our October 2016 Committee Meeting we discussed communications we had received from a number of organisations and movements interested in continuing and furthering UK involvement with the rest of Europe in the post-Referendum situation. We decided that FiE was open in principle to cooperation in appropriate ways with all such types of organisation.

The CEC Open Letter

Just before the Referendum we received a 10,000-word document from the Conference of European Churches (CEC), dated 21 June, *What Future for Europe? Reaffirming the European Project as Building a Community of Values: an Open Letter of CEC to Churches and Partner Organisations in Europe and an Invitation to Dialogue and Consultation* (henceforth the CEC Open Letter). It was designed to launch 'a broad process of consultation between CEC and its membership leading to the next CEC General Assembly in 2018'. At our AGM in July 2016 we discussed the FiE response to this document. Our text was subsequently drafted by Ken Medhurst, the Research Director of FiE, and modified after comments from various Committee members. We discussed the final version at our Committee Meeting on 20 October and I sent it to CEC shortly afterwards.

At the AGM we also decided to write to the churches which are members of FiE and/or CTBI urging them to compose their own responses and to send them directly to CEC, with a copy to FiE. I did so after the October meeting, sending each church a copy of the FiE response and a covering letter. The latter included suggestions for ways in which churches in the UK might offer practical cooperation with churches in other parts of Europe: some suggestions of this nature had been made by Committee members in the course of discussions of Ken Medhurst's draft, but we decided that the FiE response should focus more on matters of principle and overall strategy and that more detailed proposals for cooperation would best come from the various churches themselves.

David Thomas and Keith Archer attended a conference 'Europe – Where Now?' in Edinburgh, 6-7 April 2017. It was the North-West European preparation for the CEC Assembly in Novi Sad in 2018 and its main purpose was to look at responses to the CEC Open Letter. There had been 19 responses from the whole of Europe, of which three had been from the UK, including that of FiE, which had apparently been well received in CEC. Bob Fyffe, the General Secretary of CTBI, commented on how tortuous a process it was to get churches involved in European questions.

The text of the FiE response to the CEC Open Letter was published in issue No. 25 of our *Faith in Europe Briefings*, available on our website, <www.faithineurope.org.uk>. A summary and analysis of the responses to the CEC Open Letter, and a report on the outcome of the Edinburgh conference, by Peter Pavlovic, the Study Secretary at CEC, are available at <www.ceceurope.org/open-letter/>.

Presentations at FiE Briefing Meetings

Issue No.24 of *Faith in Europe Briefings*, dated October 2016, contained the texts of some presentations at recent FiE Briefing Meetings: 'A Christian European State: Religion in Modern Ukraine' by Robert Brinkley, British Ambassador to Ukraine from 2002 to 2006 (April 2015); 'Thinking Creatively about Europe' by The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dr Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury and now Master of Magdalene College Cambridge (July 2015); and 'Christianity as the Soul of Europe' by the Rt Revd Dr Robert Innes, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe (July 2016). All the issues of *Faith in Europe Briefings* since 2000 are available on our website.

At our Briefing Meeting on 20 October 2016 we considered the political and economic consequences for the UK in the light of the result of the Referendum, with particular reference to the role and position of the churches in the constituent nations of the UK. Our first speaker was Iain McLean, a Professor of Politics at Oxford University and a Quaker, who spoke on the topic 'Brexit and the Regions'; he also offered some reflections on the position of the churches in Scotland after the Referendum. Our second speaker was Dr Kenneth Milne, former Principal of the Church of Ireland College of Education in Dublin and Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Irish Council of Churches. He spoke on 'Brexit: an Irish

Perspective'. He pointed out that the Irish churches all transcend the political border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and that after Brexit (really UKexit) the EU border will run across the island of Ireland, even through dioceses. There are thus huge implications not only for the remainder of the EU, but for Ireland and its churches in particular. We were also very glad to have a contribution on the Welsh perspective from Revd Dr Noel Davies, the convenor of the Welsh Churches' Working Group on Wales and Europe. He laid emphasis on the good and effective cooperation amongst the various churches in Wales.

Issue No.25 of *Faith in Europe Briefings*, dated November 2017, contained the texts of two presentations at our Briefing Meeting on 19 January 2017, which focused on the Baltic States: 'Estonia' by Tiit Pädam, a priest of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) and a teacher in the Theology Faculty of Uppsala University; and 'Latvia: Living at the Crossroads, a Land in Between' by Eliza Zikmane, a member of the Council of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Great Britain and a member of the Committee of the Anglican-Lutheran Society.

This issue of *Faith Europe Briefings*

For our Briefing Meeting on 18 January 2018 we invited members and associates of Faith in Europe to compile short presentations on the topic 'Whither Brexit? The Prospects for Britain and Europe'. By 'Europe' we had in mind Europe as a whole, including non-EU countries. The result was an excellent round-table with seven presentations, a response by Brendan Donnelly and then general discussion. This issue of *Faith in Europe Briefings* brings together those presentations

The presentations at the January meeting are preceded by a talk by Jim Memory which was given in Gloucester Cathedral a few days before the Referendum in June 2016 which gives a concise history of the European Union and highlights key issues which in his view needed to be considered by those intending to vote.

Memory writes that 'the EU began with a Christian soul, a focus on building peace and solidarity among nations... [and] has moved from being a moral project, to a political project, to an economic project'. The presentations collected in this issue broadly follow that trajectory of focus.

In this Editorial I highlight some of the main themes in the presentations and consider how our responses to them might shape the future agenda of Faith in Europe.

Fear and fantasy

Several of our contributors highlight the misinformation (whether deliberate or the result of ignorance) which have characterised the whole debate. Richard Seebom says that emotional arguments have been used by the Remain side as well as by the Leave side. Jim Memory identifies 'Project Fear' (used by the Remain side) and 'Project Fantasy' (used by the Leave side). I would suggest that, similarly, 'Fear' underlies the Leave case as well. Keith Archer quotes 'an oldish member of a TV Question Time audience shortly before the Referendum': 'We stood alone in the past, and we can do it again'. Archer comments:

In this situation simplicities are immensely attractive. Seek refuge from an incomprehensible present in images of a simplified, imaginary past. Build a 'big and beautiful wall' to keep the outside world out. Or 'take back control'.

'That seems to be the spirit behind Brexit for some at least', says Archer. 'The past cannot be ignored,' he writes; 'it's the stuff the present is made of. But it no longer exists except in

people's imaginations, and that makes it infinitely malleable.' Present reality, says Archer, is a world inextricably tangled together; 'wheels within wheels within wheels'. He writes:

If it ever was possible to dismiss a crisis beyond our borders as 'a quarrel in a far away country between people of which we know nothing', that time has passed. The Second World War revealed the need for international institutions, and globalisation has shown how everything all over the world is interlinked.

He gives examples: war in the Middle East, terrorism in Europe, poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, the economic policies of rich countries, climate change, mass migration.

Lessons from history

A long view of history is needed to give a balanced and nuanced perspective to the place of the UK in Europe. Keith Best writes: 'From the days of Erasmus to those of the Grand Tour Europeans moved effortlessly throughout Europe', and that this freedom was curtailed only in the early twentieth century, 'by narrow nationalism, war and the need for passports.' The context of the birth of the EU is the recent past: that of the 'short twentieth century', with its two World Wars and Cold War.

Keith Best sees the EU's 'freedom of movement' as a restoration of an old equilibrium. Young people nowadays travel freely through Europe and projects like the Erasmus Programme promote this easy interchange. Some of our contributors, such as Keith Archer, Keith Best and David Blackman, talk of international experiences which crucially widened their world views. Some of these experiences were during the Second World War or the Cold War standoff; and they too led to the realisation that European cooperation was an imperative. Jim Memory writes 'This Saturday I will turn 50 years of age. Half a century and yet I have never had to bear a weapon to defend my country. That is an extraordinary historical anomaly in the context of European history.'

Here Win Burton sounds a cautionary note, perhaps pinpointing a basic problem in the UK's assumptions about the EU and hence its expectations of it: 'It is ironic that what Britain originally signed up for back in 1973 was actually, in the people's mind, the "Common Market". Europe the Peace Project has never resonated in Britain as it did in continental Europe.'

Jim Memory deliberately puts 'the Economy' last in his list of five issues which should be of concern to the voter. He writes:

There are lots of fact-checkers out there doing sums on the economic costs and benefits of EU membership for the UK but that begs a deeper question. Should we only be in it for what we get out of it, even if we could measure that? What price do we put on peace in Europe, if that is what the EU has helped to build? And perhaps more fundamentally, what is the economy for anyway? A Christian understanding of economics says there is a purpose for economic activity beyond wealth creation. It never loses sight of the special responsibility of the rich to care for the more vulnerable in society. Sadly the EU has lost sight of its Christian vision of solidarity and has become more and more of an economic project, losing much of its moral purpose and common identity.

Can Brexit be stopped?

Some of our contributors, including Keith Jenkins, doubt whether the Brexit process can be stopped. Keith Best thinks that too many, even among Remainers, now see leaving the EU as a *fait accompli*. Richard Seebom and Brendan Donnelly, however, talk about the possibility of a second Referendum. Donnelly writes:

I incline to the view that later in the year Parliament might make acceptance of the Prime Minister's terms for Brexit dependent upon a further Referendum. If there were a further Referendum, I think its outcome might well lead to the UK's remaining in the EU.

Both Best and Donnelly also think that even if Brexit is achieved, it will eventually become clear that it was a mistake and that the UK will seek to rejoin the European Union; unfortunately, however, this will be on worse terms than those it was on before it left.

Christianity and values

Memory, a lecturer in European Mission at Redcliffe College, is writing from an explicitly Christian missionary viewpoint, and gives missiological reflections as appendices to each section in his presentation. It is of course not part of the programme of Faith in Europe to promote Christian mission, but many FiE members would presumably agree with Memory's contentions that 'Christianity has moulded European identity' and that 'British Christians are the product of the story of Christian mission in Europe'.

John Arnold begins his paper with the argument that 'the origins of modern Europe lie mainly in Christendom'; he points back to the Venerable Bede in the seventh century as responsible both 'for the development of English national self-consciousness and for the insistence that our destiny was continental rather than insular'; and he talks about 'the contribution paid (or rather repaid) to Europe by missionaries and scholars like Alcuin and Boniface.' 'This two-way traffic of influence and enrichment, art and science, values and insights, accompanies trade and is no less important; in fact, it is more important.'

Most people would presumably agree that the founding fathers of what later became the EU were motivated by their Christian convictions; but one question which arises in the course of the presentations at our Briefing Meeting is whether and to what extent Christian values have mutated into general values.

Keith Best says that for him what really underpins the EU is the way in which Judaeo-Christian values 'have, in our lifetime, been converted into secular norms fit for a multicultural and multireligious society to which all can subscribe.' Brendan Donnelly argues that the EU 'should not be regarded as one based on specifically Christian values'; he 'would be happy to describe the EU as an ethical construct, but its philosophical attractions should be as accessible to atheists and agnostics as to the religiously committed.' For Donnelly the EU is 'a sophisticated and evolving political structure, founded above all on the rejection of nationalism', which is 'an insight by no means confined to Christians or even to believers'. Jim Memory, however, thinks that this process involves a certain loss through a misremembering of history: 'Sadly most European and British politicians are amnesiac about their Christian heritage. They point to the Enlightenment as the source of these things rather than Christianity.'

What should Faith in Europe be doing?

Earlier in this Editorial I noted that in our discussions after our AGM in 2016 we came to the view that FiE should concentrate on strengthening cultural, educational and ecumenical relationships across Europe. Ecumenical relationships will obviously involve continuing discussion on the meaning of 'values' and how far these are shared by people of all faiths and none.

In her presentation Win Burton talks about a meeting she attended in December 2017 between CEC staff and the Belgian Churches to discuss the CEC Open Letter. The central part of the title of the Open Letter is *Reaffirming the European Project as Building a Community of Values*, and Burton says that this was prominent in the discussion: 'this is a field where people in the

Churches feel there needs to be more emphasis and where the Churches can make a particular contribution.’ However, she says,

it also emerged strongly that many felt this was a word that was over-worn, empty, eroded, over-pious or even perhaps unhelpful - and at any rate needed to be re-examined: are we talking about democracy, freedom, equality, solidarity, the notions contained in the Beatitudes, European values, Christian values, human values, shared values?

She also notes that ‘There was a sharp difference of opinion... between the Orthodox Churches and the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church on the one side, and others on the other side, as the former clearly saw a need to boost efforts to re-evangelise Europe and combat secularisation.’

As noted earlier, Keith Jenkins is amongst those who doubts whether the Brexit process can be stopped. Notwithstanding his pessimism, however, he argues that we need to support those in the UK who want to keep the European question on the agenda both now and after our departure. He suggests that

our aim needs to be to press for an outcome that keeps the UK as close as possible to the EU so that the adverse effects of Brexit are minimised and so that an eventual re-entry can be effected if and when people realise that a mistake has been made.

This includes pressing the British and Irish Churches to keep the issue alive in their own and ecumenical structures. ‘Perhaps the very least that can be done’, he says, ‘is to ensure that the Church of England bishops and other religiously linked peers are adequately briefed for debates in the House of Lords.’

There is also a wider area which should be the concern of Faith in Europe: the prospects for the EU as a whole even if the UK is no longer part of it. Updating his presentation in early March for publication, Jenkins added emphasis on the renewed assertiveness of Russia in European affairs, noting that we need constantly to monitor the rapidly changing situation. Faith in Europe is of course well suited to considering Russia and its implications both for the EU and for the wider Europe, both East and West, beyond the borders of the EU itself. Another phenomenon is the rise of populism in various parts of Europe, East and West. Richard Seebom notes that populism is born out of nationalism, and populism is ‘an ideology looking for an enemy’.

Jenkins calls for the Churches of Europe to involve themselves in the necessary ‘wide reflection on the purpose and process of European integration and the recovery or establishment of a positive vision of the European future’. He notes of the Churches in the UK that they

seem broadly to follow the purported national consensus that ‘the nation’ has spoken and must not be denied Brexit. In the main, after a Referendum campaign in which they were largely silent as institutions (with the notable exception of the Church of Scotland), they have very rapidly begun to speak about reconciliation and moving on with an absence of any analysis of the way the future will unfold.

Meanwhile in Europe as a whole, he is disappointed that ‘the Conference of European Churches has apparently paid less and less attention to the issues of European integration in recent years’. However, he is encouraged by the greater involvement of the (Catholic) Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE); and several other contributors (Win Burton, Richard Seebom, David Blackman) note the dedicated work of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA).

Clearly there is a lot of work to be done here, and Faith in Europe sees it as part of its mission to involve itself in this. Jenkins concludes that ‘the coming Assembly of CEC should be challenged to renew the work on these issues and perhaps an Open Letter from Faith in Europe to the CEC Assembly might be opportune.’ And as Burton asks: ‘Indeed, is there a forum within Churches in Britain other than here, at Faith in Europe, where Europe is discussed at all?’

Dr Philip Walters is the Secretary of Faith in Europe, former Head of Research at Keston College/Institute and former Editor (1991-2015) of the journal *Religion, State & Society*.

In or Out? Jim Memory 20 June 2016

Introduction

I am not a member of a political party and I am not representing the Leave or Remain campaigns. I am certainly not going to be telling you how to vote on Thursday. But I do have an opinion and, later, when we have looked at the key issues in the Referendum, I think my position will be clear.

What you are going to hear today is a viewpoint on the Referendum from the perspective of Christian mission. I am sure some of you are asking yourselves what has Christian mission got to do with the Referendum debate? It has everything to do with it. We are constantly being told that this is the biggest political decision of our generation and potentially a turning-point in the history of our country. Well that may or may not be true, but whatever our political perspective, Christians believe that Jesus Christ, and not politics, is the hope of nations.

The earliest Christians’ confession ‘Jesus is Lord’ wasn’t so much a statement of faith as a defiant rejection of the supreme authority of Caesar. Jesus Christ, not secular political power, is our ultimate authority. His incarnation, life, death and resurrection are the key to history, the lens through which we should view everything that happens in our world, including the Referendum.

Now I am not trying to belittle the vote on 23 June. But I do want to put the Referendum into the context of what theologians call Salvation History, the mission of God to redeem his creation. That is the perspective that we should have as Christians not just on this vote but on our lives in general.

Over the last few weeks both sides of the debate have bombarded us with facts and figures to convince us to vote one way or the other. Of course most of us are aware that, as the saying goes, political campaigns ‘use statistics like a drunken man uses a lamppost; more for support than for illumination’. So a series of ‘fact-checkers’ have emerged to question those statistics and how they are being used. But then of course we have to ask: who is fact checking the fact-checkers? Is it any wonder we are confused?

So let’s step back for a minute and get some things straight. Firstly, when you hear someone talking about Europe, what are they talking about? Are they actually talking about the European continent, the Europe without borders that was populated by waves of migration through history, or the Europe of its nation-states whose wars have established the borders and shapes of countries that we know today? Or are they talking about the 28 countries and 508 million citizens of the European Union or the Eurozone, or are they talking about the 19 countries which share the euro as their currency? It is confusing, and

both sides of this debate are taking advantage of that confusion to encourage us to vote one way or the other.

But we are not only confused about Europe. We are also seriously confused about what it means to be British. Over the last 15 years or so there has been a raft of popular and academic books looking at British or English identity. And when people are confused or defensive of their own identity the most common way of reinforcing that identity, of clarifying who we are, is by stating who we are not. So we make continental Europeans 'others', and say they are not like us.

Of course, it has always been that way. Britain has been defining itself against the rest of Europe throughout its history; as have the Spanish, and the French, and the Germans. So we are not particularly unusual in defining ourselves against the other countries of Europe.

My youngest daughter is applying to study history at university and over the last few months I have been to quite a few Open Days. And it struck me once again that it is simply impossible to tell the history of Britain without also telling the history of Europe. Europe's history is our history. Many of our political structures, and countless bits of what we consider British culture, were either imported from other parts of Europe, or adapted from them, or emerged in reaction to them. And likewise, quite a few things that we consider European were adopted or adapted from British culture or institutions. It was British legal experts who, after the Second World War, took the lead in the drafting of a bill of rights for the fledgling democracies of Europe, which became the European Convention on Human Rights.

So the first thing I really want to challenge this evening is the idea that we can 'get out of Europe'. Forgive me for the analogy but Europe is a bit like the Hotel California of the eponymous Eagles song 'You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave'. On 23 June we can choose to leave the European Union, but we can't leave Europe. We can deny that we are European. We can engage in wholesale historical revisionism or reconstruct a mythical past of an island Britain that didn't have to put up with

interference from the continent, but that wasn't even true in the days of Richard II in the fourteenth century, or should we call him Richard of Bordeaux, for that is where he was born.¹ We can't get out of Europe because it is part of our identity. We are Europeans, and if you have any doubts about that, just ask an African or an Asian if British people are Europeans. The vote on 23 June is not going to change that, whatever the result.

In a moment I am going to focus in on the key themes of the Referendum debate, setting out some of the arguments and giving a Christian mission perspective on each one, but before that I want to say a few things about the European Union and Britain's relationship with it.

A brief history of the European Union

First of all, a little pub quiz question. Who said this?

We must build a kind of United States of Europe. The process is simple. All that is needed is the resolve of hundreds of millions of men and women to do right instead of wrong, and gain as their reward, blessing instead of cursing. The first step in the recreation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany. In this way only can France recover the moral leadership of Europe. There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany.

It was Winston Churchill. After the Second World War it was clear to all that European reconstruction required more than American money, it needed cooperation, it needed structures that would foster peace and understanding, extend democracy and freedom. It needed supranational institutions that would keep nationalism in check.

Churchill's speech led to the creation of the Council of Europe with the idea of fostering democracy, the rule of law and human rights across Europe, and ultimately to the much

¹ The Gloucester meeting was taking place the Parliament Room where for a few months the parliament of young Richard II met in the autumn of 1378.

maligned European Court of Human Rights. But neither of those are European Union structures, so however you choose to vote, we will still be part of the Council of Europe and still subject to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The origins of the EU were in the creation of another institution altogether, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the vision of Robert Schuman, the then French Foreign Minister, and a group of other prominent Christian Democrats. The Schuman Declaration proposed the creation of an institution that would share sovereignty over the production and trade in coal and steel, the raw materials for war, between France and Germany, and any other country that chose to join. Its aim was to make war 'not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible'.

Although coal and steel are important commodities, a reading of that declaration makes it very clear that the economic gains of cooperation were very much a secondary objective. The principal goals were peace and solidarity. NATO founded in 1949 sought to ensure peace in Europe through mutual defence in case of war. The ECSC founded two years later sought to prevent conflicts occurring in the first place.

The role of prominent (mainly, but not exclusively, Catholic) Christians at the start of the EU is often forgotten as is its original purpose – as a peace initiative. This Saturday I will turn 50 years of age. Half a century and yet I have never had to bear a weapon to defend my country. That is an extraordinary historical anomaly in the context of European history. We should never forget those who gave their lives to win the war against Fascist Germany, but neither should we forget how peace has been sustained and the European Coal and Steel Community was an important part of that.

By 1957 there was a broadening of those initial objectives leading to the creation of the European Economic Community. Into the English language came the phrase 'The Common Market', with then members France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, signing the Treaty of Rome. The treaty sought to engender economic cooperation and prosperity by the

removal of trade barriers, enabling free movement of labour and capital between member countries and the creation of common policies for transport and agriculture, the famous Common Agricultural Policy.

The UK was invited to join but declined and instead helped to found the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which promoted free trade but little more. Very quickly it was clear that the EEC was seeing much greater economic growth than the EFTA. Britain changed its mind and applied to join the EEC but was vetoed twice by the French.

The UK finally joined the European Community in 1972, with the focus very much on 'joining the Common Market', much less on the parts of the European Communities Act which would see European directives transposed directly into UK law, the source of many of the UK's problems with the EU down the years. The 1975 Referendum was effectively a ratification of that decision.

The Common Agricultural Policy in practice favoured some member-states over others, leaving the UK, with its relatively small agricultural sector, obtaining much less financial support for their farmers than France despite their roughly similar populations and contributions. This, together with the reality that in 1984 Britain had the second-weakest economy in the EEC, enabled Margaret Thatcher to negotiate a rebate on the UK's contribution.

1985 saw the signing of the Schengen Agreement which saw the removal of border controls between the five initial signatory countries. The UK opted out of Schengen.

And so we come to the final part of our brief history of the EU, the Maastricht Treaty of 1993. The European Community became the European Union, and with it a broad range of greater European integration – a strengthened EU Parliament in Brussels, the creation of a European Central Bank and a common currency (the euro). The UK opted out and retained sterling.

The UK also initially opted out of the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty which set out broad social policy objectives which were

seen by many as a challenge to UK sovereignty. The Labour government opted back into these social provisions in 1997.

Many new countries have joined the EU since its creation: the 28th and latest was Croatia in 2013. In the UK, the impact of this enlargement has become increasingly visible since the mid-2000s as more than a million Poles and other Eastern Europeans have come here to find work.

The most recent treaty, the Lisbon Treaty, sought to recognise this broader membership by introducing a system of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers along with a number of other significant structural reforms to bring about greater integration. British dissatisfaction with these developments was symbolised by the absence of then Prime Minister Gordon Brown from the 'family photo' to commemorate its signing. He signed the Lisbon Treaty in private after the event.

That's a massively simplified history of the origins of the EU and our relationship with it, and with that context we can now turn our attention to the Referendum and the main themes that I suggest we should be thinking about as we come to vote.

We are faced with an apparently simple choice – to remain in the EU or to leave it – but that is pretty much the only simple thing about it. The arguments are lined up by both sides of the debate in what I characterise as Project Fear versus Project Fantasy.

Project Fear versus Project Fantasy

Project Fear is how most of the arguments in favour of remaining in the EU are stacked up. Fear about what will happen if we leave. For example, from Britain Stronger in Europe:

To vote to leave is to take a leap into the unknown, risking a weaker economy, the prospects of future generations and a loss of influence on the world stage.

Even the UK Government's own leaflet uses fear in this way. So we have: 'Over 3 million UK jobs are linked to exports to the EU', so vote Remain or you might lose your job. Or 'If the UK voted to leave the EU the resulting

economic shock would risk higher prices of some household goods', so vote Remain or prices will rise. Or 'A vote to leave could mean a decade or more of uncertainty', since it will take us a long time to do deals on trade from outside the EU. And as you know, the US President weighed in on this one a couple of weeks ago saying that Britain would be 'at the back of the queue' for negotiating a trade deal with America if it quit the EU. So leave the EU and it will be Obamageddon.

Against that stands Vote Leave and what I call Project Fantasy. Their message is essentially that pretty much everything that is wrong with Britain is down to being part of the EU and we would be much better if we were to leave. For example, from Vote Leave:

A vote to 'remain' means the permanent supremacy of EU law with all this involves for our prosperity and democratic government.

If the Remain campaign uses fear of the future, the Leave campaign stokes malcontent about current realities, but with the added element of fantastic promises about what might be possible, and that by leaving the EU we can 'take control'.

So we can take control of our money and then spend it on our own country. And that is where the much disputed £350 a week comes in. So as Michael Gove said:

If we vote to leave, we take back control. We can take back the £350m we give to the EU every week. We can spend more on our priorities like the NHS. We can take back control of our economy.

Or we have the promise that we can take control of our borders. Michael Gove again:

Outside the EU, we could have a points-based system like Australia. We could welcome talented people from across the world but block those whose presence here isn't in our interests.

Or the promise that we can regain control of decisions that affect us, rather than having to apply directives from Brussels.

So in essence the Vote Leave campaign argues that being part of the EU is holding Britain back. Things would be much better if we were to leave.

Now I have tried to give a brief but fair representation of how the campaigns present their facts and arguments but I am not going to be picking them apart today. Not only because quite frankly both campaigns have been desperately disingenuous but mainly because I think it is a much better to look at the issues more broadly and ask ourselves how Christians should be approaching them. Of all people, Christians shouldn't be controlled by fear, nor should we allow ourselves to be manipulated by secular fantasies about a better future.

So briefly we are going to look at five crucial issues relating to the Referendum. At the end of each one I will then consider the issue from the perspective of Christian mission.

Identity – who are we?

Our identity is somewhat like an onion in that it consists of many layers. Some of these layers are inherited (your ethnic characteristics, for example) and some are chosen (like your football team). When we say 'I am a Christian' we are affirming something very fundamental about our identity. We are saying that for us Jesus Christ is Lord, above all others. Our core identity is in him, and all the other layers of our identity, including our nationality, come after that.

How we will vote in this Referendum will have a lot to do with whether we see ourselves as having a European identity or not. Are we Europeans first and then British, British first and then European, or just British and not European at all?

Lydia of Thyatira was the first European Christian (Acts 16). Over two thousand years through persecution, martyrdom, heresies, bloody wars, politics and schism, Christianity has moulded European identity. The geographical and psychological boundaries of today's Europe are in many ways the witnesses to that tortuous history. And we as British Christians are the product of the story – the story of Christian mission in Europe.

Our European ideas of government and law, along with Biblical ethics for family and community, human rights, equality and justice, developed from that Christian understanding.

And as saw earlier, the EU began with a Christian soul, a focus on building peace and solidarity among nations. Sadly most European and British politicians are amnesiac about their Christian heritage. They point to the Enlightenment as the source of these things rather than Christianity. The EU has moved from being a moral project, to a political project, to an economic project.

Can a purely economic post-Christian identity foster genuine peace and solidarity across Europe? What does it mean to say 'I am a European' today? Of course this very same challenge is faced by all of us here in the UK. What does it mean to say 'I am British' or 'I am English'? Even without the European issue we have something of an identity crisis. And we should be very careful that we don't allow nationalism to take advantage of this identity crisis, encouraging us to reinforce who we are by making a point of who we are not. All the rhetoric around 'making Britain great again' plays on this, and the rise of popular nationalist movements around Europe indicates it is a message that is starting to take hold and could well tear Europe apart.

Missiological reflection

Europe was not always identified with Christianity. That it became so was the result of Christian mission to Europe and in Europe. Sadly that Christian identity has been forgotten, suppressed or abandoned as Europeans have placed their hope for the future in economic prosperity rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet that does not have to be the future for Europe. However you choose to vote in the Referendum, the loss of Europe's soul should spur British Christians to action not disengagement; to commit ourselves once again to mission in Europe. Faced with the godlessness of today's Europe we should respond as the Celtic missionaries once did, by recommitting ourselves to sharing the message of hope in Jesus Christ among all of Europe's peoples. Whether we

are in the EU or not, that task is always upon us.

Migration

Closely connected to this identity crisis is the issue of immigration, the presence of 'others' in our midst.

Migration is a bit of a political hot potato. But this is the principal issue of the Referendum for many people, particularly older people. They are experiencing the change of their communities, the apparently uncontrolled arrival of people who don't speak their language or understand their culture, and they are fearful. To dismiss that as racism is to misunderstand just what a challenge migration is.

But our attitude to migration often reveals a dreadful double standard. For 300 years after the discovery of the New World, Britain was not an immigrant nation; it was an emigrant one. Until relatively recently, there were few occasions when net migration to the UK was positive. Passenger statistics show that between 1853 and 1913 an astonishing 13 million British citizens left the land of their birth, bound mainly for North America, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand.

The British are the most dispersed nationality on earth. There are 41 countries where at least 10,000 Britons reside and a further 60 with British communities of more than 1000. And in the case of Europe, the government estimates that 2.2 million British citizens live in the EU's 27 other countries, roughly the same as the number of EU citizens living here, at least until very recently.

Whilst freedom of movement was roughly a zero-sum game like this nobody was particularly concerned. But EU enlargement in 2004 and the 2008 economic crisis changed all that. After 2004 significant numbers of Eastern Europeans (particularly Poles) started to arrive in the UK and after 2008 these numbers were bolstered by many Southern Europeans. The UK is not the only destination for these internal migrants but it has been the principal one.

Migration from former British colonies has continued, though since 2010 government

policy has restricted visas and made this more difficult. And throughout this period Britain has received asylum seekers and refugees from many countries around the world. And that is before we even begin to talk about the 2015 so-called Migrant Crisis.

In one sense the argument that by leaving the EU we can 'take back control of our borders' is a mirage. The UK is not in the Schengen Area so all those who enter the country must show their passport or EU identity card. But the flows of migrants, and our own very weak mechanisms for gathering statistics on them, mean that the unease about migrant numbers is real and so for many people this is a powerful argument for the Leave campaign.

What I find frustrating is the dishonesty on all sides about the relationship between economic growth and migration. An OECD report from May 2014 asked the simple question 'Is migration good for the economy?' and the answer was an emphatic 'Yes'. You can control migration, but only at the expense of economic growth. Of course that only looks at the economic impact, not other social or cultural impacts of migration, but we should be honest. Migrants massively benefit our economy, at the expense of the economies of their home countries, who have often invested hugely in training them. There is unquestionably a need for a debate about migrant numbers in the UK, integration of those migrants, how they engage with our values and culture, housing, impact on public services and so on, but it does need to be an honest one. Are we prepared to restrict our economic growth in order to do a better job of coping with migration? Of course that's not the question that is before us in June.

Missiological reflection

Christian mission is normally understood as taking the good news of Jesus to the nations. Migration has changed all that. God has brought the nations to us. People who would never come into contact with the gospel in their own country have Christians as neighbours. And along with the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists have come hundreds of thousands of Christians. Church planting among diaspora communities in Britain is extraordinary. Just one denomination, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, has

planted over 700 congregations in the last thirty years among Nigerians in the UK. Perhaps God's purpose in this is to re-evangelise Britain, but whatever we think about migration, as Christians we cannot ignore the imperative to 'love our neighbour', and today in Britain, often our neighbour is a migrant.

Freedom

Freedom is another aspect the Christian faith has bequeathed to our Europe and the West. I can still recall my first visit to East Asia where I encountered a society that did not take democratic freedoms as a given. It was quite a shock and I never again took freedom for granted.

One of the functions of a democratic government is to manage the freedoms of its citizens. In almost every society some degree of personal freedom is surrendered to the rule of law for the wider common good. On an even larger scale almost every nation surrenders some degree of its national sovereignty for the global common good, with the notable exceptions of North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Belarus.

Of course the corollary of that is that sometimes the individual nation is called to account. Britain is not free to do as it likes with its employment legislation but has to comply with European directives. But that is the price we pay for a greater good – protection of workers from abusive corporations, maternity and paternity rights, and so on. Ultimately this is a question of balance between our freedoms as individuals and as a nation, and the greater good of working together with others.

Yes, membership of the European Union has required the UK to surrender some degree of its sovereignty. But, regardless of whether we vote to leave or remain, we will still be part of Europe, we will still have the same neighbours and many of the same obligations towards them.

I find myself asking the question: how much freedom is really up for grabs with this Referendum vote, within the narrow confines of our secular, consumeristic, individualised way of thinking? Consumerism appears to

offer the freedom of choice, but it actually enslaves. Capitalism promises the freedom to pursue money, secularism the freedom from religion, individualism the freedom from control by others. But these all enslave us in other ways. We might 'break free from the EU' but will we be able to break free from these things?

Missiological reflection

We do enjoy extraordinary freedoms in Britain and across the EU. Freedom of movement has its difficulties but it is also a huge opportunity for Christian mission that may be restricted if the UK decides to leave the EU. Britain is still one of the principal missionary sending countries so leaving the EU would undoubtedly have huge consequences for mission across Europe.

And let us not forget that the proclamation of freedom is part of the gospel message (Luke 4: 18,19). We are to be a prophetic voice, not just calling our political leaders to account when they abuse freedoms, ignore injustices or ride roughshod over human rights, but also pointing all women and men and children to the One who bestowed these gifts upon us, to Christ – the one who truly sets us free.

Democracy

As a form of government, democracy isn't perfect but it has proved itself through history to be the least worst option. As Winston Churchill put it, 'Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time'.

In recent years the EU has increasingly been criticised, and not just in the UK, for the democratic deficit at its heart. It is seen as remote and unresponsive to the needs of its citizens. Decisions are seen to be taken by a self-serving political elite supported by unelected functionaries with little regard for the public. The average EU turnout at elections for the European Parliament has dropped to 43%, coming close to the UK figure of 36%, and Brussels is seen by an increasing number of Europeans as part of the problem rather than the solution.

It is a classic case of one thing in theory and other in practice. In theory, EU institutions are democratic. They are either filled by direct election in the case of the Parliament (our MEPs), or indirectly by national governments, the Council of Ministers, the European Commission, the European Court of Justice and so on.

The problem with democratic legitimacy in the EU can best be illustrated graphically. If you try to draw a diagram showing the relationship between the various EU institutions it looks like a spider's web with no centre. Is it any wonder that the general public is confused about who makes the decisions, how they make them, and how they impact on you and me?

Another oft quoted statistic is that 70% of our laws originate from the EU. Again I will leave it to the fact-checkers to pick that one to pieces. Nevertheless, in the UK we have dedicated parliamentary committees to scrutinise measures before adoption but, whatever the true figure is, the widespread impression is that we no longer have any say in the laws that we have to abide by, and that is a problem for any democracy, whether it's true or not.

Ironically, one of the principles of EU governance is subsidiarity, a principle from Catholic Social Teaching, which

aims to ensure that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen and that constant checks are made to verify that action at EU level is justified in light of the possibilities available at national, regional or local level. (Eur-Lex Website)

In other words, the EU shouldn't be making decisions on things that can best be decided at a national or local level. It sounds good, but in practice most issues that need legislation in one country also need it in other countries across the Union, so all too often things get 'booted upstairs'.

The democratic deficit in the EU is, for me at least, the biggest issue I have with the EU and the strongest argument to vote Leave. But not all the fault is with the EU. A lot of it has to do with our own disinterest and disengagement from Europe.

If we want politicians with a strong democratic mandate, who have the authority to enact what they are voted in to achieve, and held to account for what they do (and don't do), then we have to take the time to know about them, their policies, and their powers. Do you know the names of any of the six SW England MEPs? Giles Chichester, Trevor Colman, Sir Graham Watson, Julie Girling, William Earl of Dartmouth, Ashley Fox. Do you care? Are you praying for them?

Missiological reflection

We would do well to recall that the vision of the Christian politicians who founded the first European Union institution, the European Coal and Steel Community, was to build a lasting peace in Europe. Jeremiah encouraged the exiles to 'seek the peace of the city' (Jeremiah 29:7). Today, nationalism is on the rise across Europe once again, much of it fuelled by democratic populism and scapegoating of migrants. The EU is a symbol of what can be achieved by putting nationalism on one side for the common good. We need to pray that the democratic deficit in the EU is not the beginning of the end for peace in our continent.

Economy

I have deliberately put economy last because in this election so often it is the first and only thing that matters. Will we be better off or worse off if we leave the EU?

The economic facts that are being quoted by both sides are the least reliable basis for making your decision, in my opinion. Perhaps the most widely repeated statistic is the supposed £350m a week that we are contributing to the EU budget. The Vote Leave campaign has that plastered everywhere, but it doesn't take into account the rebate we receive, nor the public and private sector receipts, leaving a figure of £161m a week. Still a lot of money, but less than half the gross figure. Yet if we leave the EU, but wish to retain access to the Single Market as Norway does, it is estimated that it would cost us somewhere north of £100m a week. Suddenly the price of what we get for what we give doesn't seem so exorbitant.

There are lots of fact-checkers out there doing sums on the economic costs and benefits of EU membership for the UK but that begs a deeper question. Should we only be in it for what we get out of it, even if we could measure that? What price do we put on peace in Europe, if that is what the EU has helped to build? And perhaps more fundamentally, what is the economy for anyway?

A Christian understanding of economics says there is a purpose for economic activity beyond wealth creation. It never loses sight of the special responsibility of the rich to care for the more vulnerable in society. Sadly the EU has lost sight of its Christian vision of solidarity and has become more and more of an economic project, losing much of its moral purpose and common identity.

Missiological conclusion

However you decide to vote on 23 June, please don't make your decision about the EU Referendum on economic grounds alone: 'will I be better off if we leave or remain?' To do so is to buy into the spirit of our age which puts economic self-interest above all other considerations. That is a travesty of the gospel of grace and the primary ethics of the Kingdom: love for God and love for our neighbour. Christians have a huge opportunity in our day to demonstrate in word and deed that they truly do serve God rather than money. What a powerful witness for the Kingdom of God that might be, even in the debates that surround this Referendum.

General conclusion

I myself shall be voting to remain on 23 June. In my view, on three of the five issues we have looked at today the balance is in favour of remaining: identity (in order to control nationalism); freedom (in order to provide a secondary guarantor of freedom, especially freedom of religion); and the economy (leaving the EU is likely to harm our economy). On one issue, migration, it is not clear which option is the better one. On democracy, my view is that the leave option is the better one: the EU suffers from a democratic deficit and a disconnect with its citizens.

Whatever your opinions are about the EU, however, or whether you are going to vote to leave or remain in it on 23 June, I want to finish by encouraging you to say an unequivocal Yes to Europe this evening. Yes to praying for Europe. Yes to supporting mission in Europe. Yes to loving your neighbours in Europe. In or out, let nothing deter us from bringing the hope of Jesus Christ to Europe today. For that at least, may mission to Europe remain in our vision. Amen.

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Churches and Brexit

John Arnold

18 January 2018

The origins of modern Europe lie mainly in Christendom; and major attempts in the twentieth century to replace Christianity as the spiritual guide of Europe, either by neo-paganism in its Fascist form or by atheism in its Marxist-Leninist form, have failed. All the

founders of the EEC were committed churchmen, Schumann, Monnet, Spaak, de Gasparri, Adenauer and Jacques Delors, who pleaded constantly for 'a soul for Europe'; and Christianity has a coherent belief in multiple identities, going back to St Paul, who, though

proud of his Jewishness, his Greek home town and his Roman citizenship, also claimed that 'we are citizens of heaven' (Phil. 3, 20). The implications for contemporary anxieties about identity are clear. No one was being asked to exchange their British identity for a European one. We did, however, rightly obtain not an alternative but an additional identity as Europeans, like Douglas Hurd putting on a Loden overcoat over a Savile Row suit.

This attitude can be traced back to the Venerable Bede (673-735), who was equally responsible for the development of English national self-consciousness and for the insistence that our destiny was continental rather than insular. But, if the English were to receive the blessings of belonging to a wider world, they would need, for example, to adopt a common date for Easter, which was the equivalent then of accepting directives from Brussels now. Bede lived to see the contribution paid (or rather repaid) to Europe by missionaries and scholars like Alcuin and Boniface. This two-way traffic of influence and enrichment, art and science, values and insights, accompanies trade and is no less important; in fact, it is more important. That is why the European Churches said together in the *Charta Ecumenica* (Easter 2001)

The Churches support an integration of the European continent. Without common values, unity cannot endure. We are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity contributes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment ... we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail.

One of the things which the Churches have contributed through their engagement in the European institution is concern for the poor, at home and abroad – the insistence that Europe cannot be satisfied with being a 'club des riches' – a rich man's club. Another is the note of universalism. For Bede communion with Rome was not a limited or limiting engagement. For him, as for everyone before the Great Schism in the eleventh century, it

included communion with the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, with Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa, with the whole known inhabited world, in a word the *oikumene*. The *Charta Ecumenica* continues

At the same time we must avoid Eurocentricity and heighten Europe's sense of responsibility for the whole of humanity, particularly for the poor all over the world.

One more word about the past. Some have claimed that the origins of Brexit lie in the Reformation, seen as a kind of proto-Brexit in Tudor dress. But in its religious as opposed to political aspects the Reformation in England was a European movement, carried by refugees, immigrants and asylum-seekers like the Italian Peter Martyr, the Polish John Laski, the Swiss Bullinger and the German Martin Bucer, who all conversed and corresponded with the English Reformers in Latin, the *lingua franca* of Western Europe. One of the lunacies of the present situation is that we may leave, just when the European institutions are realising that they would work better with a single language and that the only candidate is English. The time may come when everyone is speaking international English and the only native speakers are the Irish, just when Sinn Fein is trying to revive Old Irish in Ulster.

If Brexit prevails, there will still be plenty for the Churches to do. No one is talking of leaving the Council of Europe; cultural and educational cooperation and ecumenical relations will be more important than ever. The Churches cannot let the limits of their fellowship be defined by anything other than the gospel itself, as we showed during the long *Kirchenkampf* with the German Democratic Republic. St Paul speaks of our salvation in terms of the breaking down of a wall of separation. This is not the time to be erecting new walls, least of all in Ireland.

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Ecumenical Work in Brussels

Win Burton

18 January 2018

'Soul for Europe'

I was asked to make a short contribution to the discussion on the basis of my time spent working in Brussels in the Ecumenical Centre from 1974, and latterly between 1999 and 2006 as coordinator of the 'Soul for Europe' Initiative also based in the Ecumenical Centre.

This comes with two caveats: that my experience with 'Soul for Europe' was not a happy or positive one and 11 years later I am afraid my disillusionment and cynicism linger on; and that one quickly gets out of touch once away from Brussels, back in cosy Oxfordshire in retirement, especially as both the Referendum result and the ensuing so-called 'negotiations' have enraged and saddened me to a point where I see little point in following the news and process on a regular basis.

I do however remain in touch with the CEC office and recently attended a meeting between staff and the Belgian Protestant Federation discussing the Open Letter. ²

In terms of the failure and termination of the 'Soul for Europe' initiative, I will simply remind Faith in Europe members (who have largely heard the saga before), that it foundered in my view largely because of two weak points.

First, it was the brainchild of Jacques Delors as head of the so-called Forward Studies Unit or *Cellule de Prospective* in the 1990s: a small visionary team at a very particular time in the EU's history, which then disappeared almost from one day to the next from 2000 on.

Second, it was linked in its operational set-up to money – to the handing out of grants for multi-faith multi-country projects. The crisis in the European Commission after President

Prodi took over from Jacques Santer in 2000 was largely over misuse of money, and this function was taken away from 'Soul' (being an outside body), and no-one in the Commission showed any interest in it from then on – so we were left basically talking amongst ourselves.

Even in its earlier years, the projects thus funded had relatively little publicity or ripple effect and so one might query whether this was the right way to be finding and strengthening Europe's 'soul' – but this is admittedly a very ambitious challenge!

I might add – while hoping I will not offend anyone present – that the Christian Churches (Protestants, Catholic, Orthodox) – who were three of the six faith/conviction community partners round the table along with Muslims, Jews and Humanists – did not really 'need' Soul for Europe: it was totally marginal to the rest of their activities, and in fact, quite possibly, a time- and money-consuming irritation.

Questions

I will take the liberty of making a few additional comments and raise some questions in the light of more recent developments, despite my initial caveats! I think they are largely echoed by Faith in Europe's much appreciated submission to the ongoing CEC discussion on the Future of Europe.

Do we know what we would like the EU to become?

It is ironic that what Britain originally signed up for back in 1973 was actually, in the people's mind, the 'Common Market'. Europe the Peace Project has never resonated in Britain as it did in continental Europe. Britain, the island(s), has always been a trading, mercantile, commercial nation and what it was interested in was the economic

² See the Editorial above for further details on this document.

side of the EEC or EU. It has never bought the dimension related to a common history and heritage, nor been enthused by being part of an entity with a beaconlike potential on the world stage. Because it was Great Britain and that was enough of an identity. And now it is on the road rapidly to becoming Little Britain in search of a new identity whether it accepts that or not – it might say ‘Norway No Way’ but that looks like the way things are tending.

One might also ask, if there is still an outside chance that we could remain as full members, are we (that is, Britain as a country) prepared for that: have we any idea of what we might wish the EU to become and how to invest constructively in that for the good of all?

The reaction of the Church of England however to the CEC Open Letter tends rather in another direction: saying that the narrow focus of the CEC Brussels office on EU policies will find little or no support with their congregations, and that the focus needs to be on the wider Europe in both vision and conversation. However, there is no clear indication on how this wider focus would be different from the work currently being undertaken – nor how this would become more appealing to these congregations. It also ignores the fact that CEC’s membership is wider than the Churches of EU countries and, in its Strasbourg office, also covers the work of the Council of Europe, besides working with other bodies including the WCC on climate change and the environment, bioethics and work and society which relate to more than the EU member-states.

Nonetheless, it is clear from the summary of received reactions to the CEC Open Letter, compiled by Peter Pavlovic,³ which I urge you to read, that other member-Churches too want the focus of both CEC’s work and the EU’s policies to be less on the purely economic and more on more sustainable and social goals. There is also a call to come together to pool ideas on how to work alongside Euroscepticism.

Values

Prominent in the meeting I attended between CEC staff and the Belgian Churches in mid-December to discuss the Open Letter was the

notion of ‘values’, and it is clear too from the summary I have just mentioned (and FiE’s own submission) that this is a field where people in the Churches feel there needs to be more emphasis and where the Churches can make a particular contribution.

However, it also emerged strongly that many felt this was a word that was over-worn, empty, eroded, over-pious or even perhaps unhelpful - and at any rate needed to be re-examined: are we talking about democracy, freedom, equality, solidarity, the notions contained in the Beatitudes, European values, Christian values, human values, shared values?

There was a sharp difference of opinion at the Belgian meeting between the Orthodox Churches and the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church on the one side, and others on the other side, as the former clearly saw a need to boost efforts to re-evangelise Europe and combat secularisation.

And where are these discussions to take place – both within our separate Christian communities and with other faiths, whether in Britain or in Europe? It is perhaps an irony, as Ian Bradley pointed out in a recent article in *The Tablet*, that in the year of celebrating 500 years since the Reformation, Britain’s Catholic Churches have fuller pews than any others. Indeed, is there a forum within Churches in Britain other than here, at Faith in Europe, where Europe is discussed at all, or indeed the role of the Church in British society which, Referendum or not, is not so very different? And if there isn’t, is it because it is unimportant or because it is too sensitive?

In any case there was also a feeling that values must always be coupled with rights and responsibilities, and that words must immediately be linked to actions. I remember when I first worked with the Commission of Churches in Brussels as it was called in the 1980s, that we were talking about championing the voiceless in speaking to power in Brussels. Nowadays I think the emphasis would be more on empowering the voiceless to speak for themselves – but is that easier said than done?

I certainly feel that the inability of the EU as a whole, and of most of its member-states, and of the religious communities at national level

³ See the Editorial above.

in most member-states, to come up with anything approaching an adequate response to the migration and refugee crisis is a massive indictment for all the institutions concerned, and should be a subject for a ruthlessly self-critical analysis. The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and Quakers (QCEA) at European level are the two clear exceptions – and their efforts deserve not only commendation but far more publicity, support and encouragement.

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The EU – Launch Pad not Burden

Richard Seebohm

18 January 2018

My elderly German cousin (who devotes himself to contesting human rights abuses in China) in his Christmas message speaks of the great idiocy of Brexit. I agree. My advocacy for a reversal now comes in three categories: the rational case, the emotional case and the practical case. I speak from a faith standpoint, but coloured by a working life often engaged with Brussels – not, I hope, a disqualification.

The rational case

Trade, economics, taxable capacity

Our economy thrives now but we are still in the Single Market and the Customs Union. Business and businesses, especially in services, which count for more than manufacturing, are already draining away, but once out the trend will accelerate. Sterling will fall and borrowing costs will rise. Can we really see trade opportunities that are out of our reach as an EU member-state?

Negotiating any deal and avoiding legal voids

This is not looking easy. Our ministers have no mental image of an end product. Our civil service lacks skills and staff numbers.

EU safeguards for consumers, workers and the environment

We stand to lose these if they are to be bargaining counters for trade deals with other countries – also, if a far right government here has a free rein.

A hard Brexit

This makes a break-up of the UK more likely. The Northern Ireland border is a test case.

Our border and internal infrastructures

These will strangle EU trade whatever the deal.

Rights of EU citizens here and ours in the EU

A fair system is hard to pin down in detail, and we are unlikely to have the resources for speedy casework. We are even now losing key personnel in every sector.

EU programmes for research, education, culture, infrastructure, justice and security

These are under-reported and will vanish. Euratom is just one.

Agriculture and fisheries policies

These may be improved outside the EU – if we can trust those in power.

The emotional case

The emotional case is coloured for me by statements overheard – a Yorkshire farmer saying, well, we just hate foreigners, and a Suffolk business owner saying well, I hate Brussels. I set against this the Buddhist text reported by Neil McGregor which tells us to banish Greed, Ignorance and Hatred.

In fact some emotional or intangible attitudes are on the Remain side as well as with the Leavers.

A peace project

The EU is peace project. Only by staying in can we help it to remain so.

A counterbalance against extremism

Our EU membership is a counterbalance against extreme right or left policies here, and also against extremists elsewhere in the EU.

The voice of the people

I won't list the many arguments for and against the Referendum's inviolability. MPs are representatives and not delegates.

Britishness?

As told to the recent conference of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA), nationalism leads to populism, which is an ideology looking for an enemy.

Immigration

Immigration is blamed for much more than its downside effects. Much resentment (and Islamophobia) applies to non-EU migrants.

Sovereignty and control

Sharing sovereignty isn't losing it. We share the burden of necessary or desirable responsibilities.

Unelected, undemocratic, faceless functionaries

They are less opaque than British officials and are mainly working out how to achieve what the elected ministers of member-state national governments have told them to do. The European Parliament dismissed the entire Commission in 1999.

Ever-closer union

Burden-sharing is a much more appropriate concept. If this were given more weight, the Euro trauma could be better tackled. No other member-state feels that its individuality is under threat. Some are using Brexit as an example for flouting EU principles such as the rule of law.

Foreign judges

This is the hardest phobia to understand. It must imply that non-British judges are more likely than ours to base decisions on prejudice and not on the letter of the law they are implementing. (The Strasbourg European Court of Human Rights is only a Brexit target through sheer ignorance, but it is a target of the same campaign.)

Elitism

It is eminent public figures who have the world view that lets them see the risk to the UK's diplomatic place in the world posed by (say) 20 years of Brexit – a status perhaps comparable with Taiwan now? Blindness to the plight of the under-privileged is a defect of our domestic class system, not of the EU.

The practical case

Remain campaigns have never had a clear message or coherent leadership. So, what can be done?

Burden-sharing

This as a slogan is an antidote to 'take back control'. The EU as it has evolved can be seen as a secure, logical, geographically extensive and humane platform (or playing field) on which capitalism can be practised profitably but not exploitatively. Even the Corbyn plan to renationalise utilities simply makes them

part of the platform and not the market. As it is, regulatory competence in the UK is fast being undermined by public sector cuts.

Jeremy Corbyn

He could be the missing link in the Remain campaign. He has shown himself to be pusillanimous in most policy fields, so that an EU *volte face* is quite conceivable. The clouds of glory he would then trail would upset every psephological appletart.

Austerity

Austerity as a political programme is a millstone for the UK and also for the Eurozone. Retrieving our EU membership should be a signal for better burden-sharing and for the abandonment of projects like Trident and HS2 that sap the UK public sector budget. There might also be a window to wind down militarism more widely. Routine domestic government measures seem to have been sidelined unless hijacked by scandals.

Legislation

More immediate is the risk presented by the Withdrawal Bill now before Parliament. Once it gets Royal Assent, reversal will be far more difficult. Repealing an Act does not restore to life the primary and secondary legislation that the Act has itself repealed.

A second Referendum

It is hard to see a Brexit reversal without this. But a Macron would simply say we are putting an end to this farce. The 2016 event was explicitly advisory, and our negotiation experience shows that Brexit does nothing for us.

I regret the lack of a discerned Quaker message making some of these points.

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Christian Values and the EU

David Blackman

18 January 2018

My own background

As a boy I spent a term in early 1951 at a German school in a small town south of Kassel, in the American zone. I had to report every Monday morning to the US 'Civil Resident' in Giessen; he said that I presented a problem, since my safety was his responsibility if and when the Russian tanks came through the Fulda Gap. On Sundays my German hosts and I sometimes went for a walk on the hill called the Meissner, and looked over the 'Zonengrenze' to a far-off, very different country. This now seems incredibly distant. Young people did not then travel frequently for study and exchange.

In April 1957 I visited family friends in Strasbourg. The father of the family had taught my father theology before the war, and my father had arranged for his daughter (one of the early woman ordinands in the *Église Réformée de France*) to study in Cambridge in the late 1940s. I shall never forget the old man explaining how he had changed his nationality four times in his lifetime. The Treaty of Rome had just been signed that month. He said

if this new treaty achieves no more than the reconciliation of France and Germany, it will have achieved a great deal, but I think it will achieve much more.

He quoted Acheson's famous remark about Britain losing an empire and not finding a role; and he asked me whether I could not see that

Britain should join these new initiatives. For me this was a politically memorable moment.

Also influential was a year spent on a fellowship in the USA (1968-69). Ironically my wife and I came back 'convinced Europeans' – and I don't think that our experience was unique.

My own involvement with EU structures

After the first Referendum the Labour Party ended its boycott of the European institutions, and took up its quota of Members of the European Parliament; I was appointed to their staff, and then to the Socialist Group – a very stimulating multinational experience. The Labour Party joined the Party of European Socialists and benefited from the experience and friendships.

I am sure that the same is true of the Liberal Party. In my personal opinion the Conservative decision to leave the European People's Party was a serious mistake. They ceased to be influenced by thinking on the centre-right and lost the contacts, and this was important when Mr Cameron suddenly needed friends and needed to anticipate political reactions.

I was also able to participate in the early days of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) in Brussels and the Anglican Chaplaincy in Strasbourg, which concerned itself also with the work of the Council of Europe which tends to be ignored; in debates about human rights one has continually to explain the distinction between the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg and the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg – a confusion fomented by our Brexiteers.

The role of the Council of Europe as a stepping-stone towards European democracy and membership of the (by now) European Union is sadly underestimated. Participation in the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and Parliamentary Assembly was an important stage in political education for 'East' and 'West'.

It was the UK which took the lead in supporting the case for enlargement of the EU to East-Central Europe – the 'Visegrád' countries – and it is sad that its pro-European past is now apparently past. I remember personally the excitement of travel to these countries in the early 1990s, when I headed a small department in the European Parliament for relations with the parliaments of the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. I also remember attending conferences organised by Harvard University's Project Liberty, where Shirley Williams urged the new democratic governments not to throw out the baby with the bathwater, for example by selling off public housing; sadly, she spoke in vain.

Challenges before us all

Defence of liberal democracy in Europe

It is now a sad fact that the prospect of Brexit distracts the EU from concentrating on the defence of liberal democracy in Europe, against the threat from the leaders of Hungary and Poland, who now promote the cause of 'illiberal democracy'; and the prospect of Brexit weakens the voice of the UK in the councils of the EU, at a time when its voice should be heard.

The governments of Poland and Hungary claim to be defending 'Christian values' when they oppose multiculturalism and immigration. There is a current dispute between Poland (noisily supported by the Hungarian leader, Viktor Orbán) and the European Commission. A museum on the Second World War which opened in Poland last year had to be closed because of criticism that it did not tell a 'sufficiently heroic story' – and did not hide antisemitism in the past.

I write in a time of rapid political developments: since I drafted this text we learn of a Polish government reshuffle; and we are between the two rounds of a Czech presidential election, where the final result will show the depth of support for respectively a 'nationalist' or a 'pro-European' candidate. [Update 5 March 2018: The former, the incumbent President Miloš Zeman, narrowly won the election in the second round.]

Are any of the Churches in Europe, west or east, contesting this development? Are our democratic parties raising the issue? In the UK, are there too many who silently, or even openly, support the nationalist position, and would oppose any strong reaction from Brussels?

The extent of Russian influence

A second issue, which concerns me, is the extent of Russian influence and even interference in our democratic processes. The current scrutiny by the House of Commons Culture Committee, and probably also the Security and Intelligence Committee, of evidence for Russian interference during the Referendum campaign and the 2017 General Election is fully justified.

I am not arguing that this is a question of Christian values; but it is another example of where the UK voice will be lacking in Brussels debates if Brexit takes place. It is not enough to say that this is a 'NATO matter', since EU Common Foreign and Security Policy are closely woven in.

The Irish border

On the border between foreign and domestic policy: Brexit and the Irish border will probably be mentioned by other colleagues. I see no Brexit solution which avoids damage to the Good Friday Agreement. Has the CTBI said anything – or any faith community? What is their opinion of the attitude of the UK government?

Reactions to Brexit from non-EU countries

One wonders also what will be the reaction of countries that have negotiated agreements with the EU, for example Norway and now Canada, if the UK manages to obtain a deal with the EU27 on more favourable terms than they obtained!

And further down the line...

Finally, on domestic affairs: is there not a risk that (whatever assurances are given now) a future British government, after Brexit, will apply 'Henry VIII procedures' to pass measures which will weaken or even abolish the '*acquis communautaire*' covering social protection and workers' rights – the Social Chapter? It is reported that some hardline pro-Brexit ministers to have started campaigning to axe the Working Time Directive after Brexit: this is the measure which prevents people working excessive hours and guarantees paid holidays. Have faith groups spoken out about this?

Concern has been expressed about the effect of Brexit in disrupting our democratic procedures, for example on migration and citizens' rights: the basic principle being that of the Rule of Law and 'sustainable governance'. One wonders also about environmental protection, and consumer protection....

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The Value of the EU

Keith Best

18 January 2018

The historical context

I speak in my personal capacity, but as Secretary of the European Movement and an

ardent advocate of the EU from the time I campaigned in the 1975 Referendum as a young man until the present I must declare

myself an ardent Remainder, but also a realist and, I hope, a pragmatist.

I was born after the Second World War, but my time in airborne and commando forces as well as a sense of history left me in no doubt in my twenties as to the *raison d'être* for the EU and its development as both an economic and a political entity.

Part of my military years were spent staring across the then-called Inner German Border at the Brocken, a hill bristling with Soviet listening devices in what was then the DDR, and the massed divisions of the Soviet Third Shock Army, which would have rolled through our single Third Division opposing it in the event of an attack, to be stopped only by the 'shoot and scoot' policy of firing a tactical nuclear weapon at the Soviet troops gathered into what we called the 'killing ground' from an 8-inch howitzer which had a range of only 16,000 yards – so you know why it was 'shoot and scoot': already limbered up to drive off to escape the fallout from its own weapon.

We lived under the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction, with the appropriate acronym of MAD, which was the threat of annihilation hanging over most of my adult life thereafter. Yet within my lifetime those men and women living in Warsaw Pact countries who were trained to point their loaded weapons at the West have become our fellow European Union citizens and live in countries which are now members of NATO. We should celebrate that common journey and not seek to undermine it.

Those with a sense of history can understand the proximity of its legacy breathing down our necks from the ghastly occurrences and bloodshed of two World Wars, both started in Europe.

Values underpinning the EU

That was the motivation for me as a young man, but for our daughters now in their twenties that is as much history as the battle of Waterloo. For the new generation we need a new motivation about the unity of the European ideal, its common shared ancestry and culture and its underpinning values.

From the days of Erasmus to those of the Grand Tour Europeans moved effortlessly throughout Europe – the precursor of 'freedom of movement', which was curtailed only by narrow nationalism, war and the need for passports. Although the granting of travelling papers dates from 1540 and there exists a passport issued on 18 June 1641 and signed by Charles I, and although in 1855 passports became a standardised document issued solely to British nationals, the modern British passport came about as a result of the 1914 British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act. At the time European nations were closing their doors. The consequences of resultant misunderstanding and separate competitive development were devastating.

These are issues which all can understand, especially at a time when we see a resurgence of nationalism and introversion throughout not just Europe but the world, with numerous examples from far-right political parties becoming more prominent to the practical effects manifested by Mr Orbán's wall and the concept of America First. If, like me, you believe in the cyclical turn of history then all is not lost – the problem is the cost of avoiding George Santayana's dicta 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it' and 'Only the dead have seen the end of war' – we must recall that he saw in his lifetime his own native country descend into fascism. We cannot afford that cost again in Europe.

For our young people the idea of roaming-free telephone and internet access and travel throughout Europe is their environment. Our daughters have friends from school and university who live in Berlin and other European countries and think nothing of a weekend reunion there – they would be at home with Erasmus and, indeed, in the cross-national project which bears his name, they often are.

It is not an innovative thought that so many young people turned out in the last General Election to vote for the Opposition as an expression both of something better than is on offer and as a sense of anger at not having manifested their interests sufficiently in the Referendum to find that, as our daughters put it, 'the older generation has stolen their future'.

From values to secular norms

What really underpins the EU apart from its shared (often bloody and competitive) history and Judaeo-Christian values? For me it is the way in which those values have, in our lifetime, been converted into secular norms fit for a multicultural and multireligious society to which all can subscribe.

True, these are inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was described by Eleanor Roosevelt at the UN as the global Magna Carta and first encapsulated in instruments of the Council of Europe rather than of the EU, but they have been transposed also into the values of the EU through the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms adopted on 18 December 2000. Its Preamble states grandiloquently that

The peoples of Europe, in creating an ever closer union among them, are resolved to share a peaceful future based on common values

and that

Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. It places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice.

It is a charter for civilised coexistence which sets a model in which mutual respect and basic tenets such as the absence of the death penalty seek to overcome the animosity, suspicion and divergence of the previous centuries.

Where are we now?

So, briefly, how do I translate these concepts into where we are now in an albeit rapidly changing political environment?

The momentum for an expression of parliamentary and popular opinion on what may be the result of a complicated disentangling of a 45-year joining at the hip of this country to the EU is growing. Thanks to

the Grieve Amendment there will be a meaningful parliamentary vote on the deal. Even before Mr Farage threw his hat into the ring there were many, including the European Movement, urging a popular vote on the result.

It is possible that Brexit can be stopped, but my realism, tempered by the psephology of Sir John Curtice and others, is that there are many even among Remainers who see us leaving the EU as a *fait accompli*. Our own polling shows that it is not issues of sovereignty but of the economy and the impact of leaving that may change minds. There has been, of course, a string of examples of the disasters that potentially await us, from no passporting of financial transactions affecting pensions and our pre-eminence in that field to the unavailability of cancer drugs should we leave Euratom (not an EU institution but governed by the European Court of Justice (ECJ)), the shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour on our businesses and the absence of affordable staff for the NHS and our care homes, to say nothing of the other pitfalls to which other speakers are referring.

My scenario for the future

My scenario for the future, therefore, is as follows.

We shall remain within both a Single Market and a Customs Union (the price of two systems and strife in Northern Ireland, not that the DUP would allow it anyway, is too great), for which we shall pay an ongoing price.

We shall remain within the EU including free movement of people for the whole of the transitional / implementation period, which will last considerably longer than two years and will straddle at least one General Election in this country. It seems clear, however, that during that phase, although subject to all the rules and regulations of the EU including the ECJ, we shall not have a place at the decision table even as observers. We shall lose one of the mainstays of our influence in Europe (although there are others such as defence and security) and, consequently, in the world. In the ongoing discussions about reform of the UN Security Council it might even jeopardise our negotiating position there.

As a patriot and a believer in Britain's beneficial influence, while not overlooking the bad side of empire and historic domination, yet certainly not as a jingoist, I believe that such loss of influence will be bad for international stability.

If you take my cyclical view, then, at some stage in the future, the UK (hopefully, still, the whole of the UK as we know it today) will wish to become more central to Europe and take the view that the best way of changing and informing an institution is from within it rather than from without.

Unfortunately, if we were then to rejoin the EU it is extremely unlikely that we could ever enjoy the privileged status we currently have, including such things such as the rebate on our contributions and exclusion from Justice and Home Affairs and other parts including the commitment to join the euro.

Sadly, also, by that time, we may have learned the hard way that there are not queues of

other countries that wish to have bilateral-only trade agreements with us, not least because, by the rules of the EU they will not be able to be more favourable than the agreements they have with the EU itself.

There will be the realisation that, while influential, our voice alone is nothing compared with it being part and, hopefully, an increasingly important part, of the EU as the largest trading bloc in the world at a time of declining influence of the USA and increasing importance of China.

In the interests of the UK and of the world and the need for peace and stability in it I can only hope that the time of which I speak comes sooner rather than later.

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Thoughts about Brexit

Keith Archer

18 January 2018

My first response to the Brexit vote was hurt and anger. I felt my country had been stolen from me. Since it was 'the will of the people' to leave the EU, I was evidently no longer one of 'the people'. And the arguments that persuaded a small majority to vote Leave were so sketchy that they amounted to deception. Now, over 18 months after the vote, my mood has softened. I watch the tangles in which our Brexiteer government enmeshes itself with something like *Schadenfreude* – though the knowledge that I too may suffer the *Schaden* does diminish my *Freude* somewhat. But the relative detachment I now feel enables me to stand back and reflect on why I favour European

integration with passion, while others oppose it with equal passion.

The clue is in the voting figures at the 2016 Referendum. Most voters over 45 voted Leave, but most up to the age of 44 voted Remain. 60% of over-60s voted Leave, but no less than 73% of 18 to 24-year-olds voted Remain. Therefore it is above all the older generation that has committed the country to Brexit. Since that is my generation, I think maybe I can speak for it.

I grew up after the War, convinced of two key things. One was that we British were better than the continentals. The Germans were

Nazis, the French were surrender-bunnies and the rest were nonentities, and we proved it by winning the War. The other was that, though we were better than the continentals, we weren't as good as the Americans. We knew we wouldn't have won the War without them, and while it had impoverished us they were richer than ever – so we thanked God for our Special Relationship with the US and clung grimly on to Uncle Sam's coat-tails. That was the world as I saw it up to the early 1960s.

Then, however, I had a series of experiences that were untypical of people of my generation. Shortly after Nigeria became independent, I went there as a teacher. We British knew we were on the wane, and that the glory days of the Empire were over. But we compensated by creating the Commonwealth, a family of nations, some of them white like us, but more that were undeveloped and that we were generously ushering into the twentieth century – and this was the vision that inspired me. My ardour soon cooled. I realised that the presence of people like me was inescapably neo-colonialist, and that the best way for me to help Nigeria develop was to go home.

A few years later I took part in the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies at Bossey, the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Institute near Geneva. There I was one of a group of 60 students from all over the world: in effect the world in microcosm. To my surprise the people with whom I felt a Special Relationship were not the Americans but the other Europeans. This was the time when the UK was renewing its attempt to join the European Common Market, and I began to see a future for the UK not as the head of an empire or a commonwealth of mainly dependent nations, but as a partner in a community of equal European nations.

That became my passion, and it has survived the development from the Common Market into today's European Union, despite developments along the way that may have been mistaken. I presume that the passion with which others of my generation voted Leave and are now pursuing Brexit is the result of a world view like mine before Nigeria and Bossey taught me otherwise. 'We stood alone in the past, and we can do it

again', said an oldish member of a TV Question Time audience shortly before the Referendum. That seems to be the spirit behind Brexit for some at least – harking back to the days of their youth, when we felt almost as good as the Americans, and to the days of their parents, when we survived despite the odds. Can it be coincidence that one of the biggest movies of 2017 was *Dunkirk*, and that *Darkest Hour* looks set to win awards in 2018?

The past cannot be ignored: it's the stuff the present is made of. But it no longer exists except in people's imaginations, and that makes it infinitely malleable. Truth well massaged may convince a domestic electorate, but sometimes the truth we see collides with the truths others see; and those looking from outside often see more clearly than those inside whether the emperor is wearing clothes or not.

Outsiders matter. If it ever was possible to dismiss a crisis beyond our borders as 'a quarrel in a far away country between people of which we know nothing', that time has passed. The Second World War revealed the need for international institutions, and globalisation has shown how everything all over the world is interlinked. If we need an emblem for the complexities of today's world, it could be the French detective series currently on BBC4, *Engrenages*, with its super-complex plotting. The BBC's translation of the word as 'Spiral' misses the point. It refers to the intermeshing cogs in a gearbox – more like 'wheels within wheels within wheels'. Today's 24-hour news media show everyone just how many wheels there are. Quarrels and crises in far-away countries send waves that break on our shores. War in the Middle East, terrorism in Europe, poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, the economic policies of rich countries, climate change, mass migration and a whole lot more – all these intermesh like *engrenages*, and the whole system is so complex that it is scarcely possible for anyone to get their head round it.

In this situation simplicities are immensely attractive. Seek refuge from an incomprehensible present in images of a simplified, imaginary past. Build a 'big and beautiful wall' to keep the outside world out. Or 'take back control'. Slogans like that might sound attractive in the heat of a referendum campaign – but does anyone seriously think

that giving an equally distant Westminster primacy over the European Court of Justice is what the voters of Sunderland longed for? In a world where international cooperation is rejected and every nation tries in vain to keep the rest of the world out, the result will surely be frustration and conflict.

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Reflecting on Brexit

Keith Jenkins

18 January 2018

The British political scene and the Brexit process

I imagine that most, if not all, members of Faith in Europe were in favour of the United Kingdom remaining in the European Union and would still support continued membership. I remain pessimistic, however, about the possibility of reversing the outcome of the 2016 Referendum either by a second Referendum or by a parliamentary vote. Two factors are at play here.

First, those arguing to leave the European Union have largely won the battle to set the current narrative about Europe. The broad assumption is that 'the nation' voted to leave and that is a once in a generation (if not a lifetime) decision which cannot be reversed without disregarding and disrespecting the will of 'the nation'. The facts, that 'the nation' means 51.9% of those who voted or 37.5% of the electorate and that the Leave campaigners would not have accepted an equally narrow vote in the other direction, are carefully ignored.

This narrative is strongly advanced by the almost universally Eurosceptic print media (only three national daily newspapers remain pro-European – the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *Daily Mirror*) which pour out invective against anyone who stands in the way of Brexit and emphasise with delight any signs that the British economy will not only

survive but flourish after Brexit, carefully ignoring or dismissing any indicators which point in a contrary direction. The impact of the narrative even finds expression in more neutral or nuanced reporting. Only a few weeks ago the BBC News highlighted the fact that manufacturing was at a ten-year high while mentioning the drastic fall in construction industry activity as a footnote. Nostalgia for a past that will never return and wishful thinking about an uncertain future predominate.

Second, there exists little political will for reversing the Referendum vote. Only three political parties represented in Parliament (the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the Green Party) supported the amendment to insert a second Referendum into the Bill going through Parliament. The Scottish National Party is also in favour of finding ways of staying in the Single Market and Customs Union.

The Labour Party, despite an appearance of favouring close links with the European Union, is substantially divided. Jeremy Corbyn, whose largely ineffectual campaigning during the Referendum campaign and some of whose statements on Europe have been ambiguous, refuses to endorse any campaign for the UK to stay in the Single Market and Customs Union even though Keir Starmer, the Shadow Brexit Secretary, has been attempting to edge the

Party in that direction. [*Update 5 March 2018*: Only recently has he accepted the considerable pressure within the Labour Party to support the UK entering into 'a new customs union' with the EU. Leading members of the Labour Party and of the trade unions have recently urged that this is not enough.]

Meanwhile the Conservative Party, apart from a small number of potential Remain rebels, remains split between those who want to leave with or without any agreement (and one senses that in some cases they would prefer there to be no agreement) in order to pursue a lightly regulated free-market low-tax economy and those who want to remain as close to the EU as possible. Given that both factions are represented in the Cabinet, it is not surprising that no one knows what exactly the Government is aiming for. [*Update 5 March*: The Cabinet has recently adopted the principle of 'managed divergence' in the sense of choosing to remain close to the EU in selected areas of policy.]

To defeat the Government, it would be necessary for all the Opposition parties to vote together and for a number of Conservative MPs to vote with them. So far that has happened only once, on the amendment to require a meaningful Parliamentary vote once the negotiations are over. It might be that if the Bill is significantly amended in the House of Lords, there might be some unity and resistance in the House of Commons. For the moment that remains an open question. [*Update 5 March*: Although there might be some signs when the House of Commons votes on amendments to the Trade Bill.]

It is also worth noting in parentheses that the Churches seem broadly to follow the purported national consensus that 'the nation' has spoken and must not be denied Brexit. In the main, after a Referendum campaign in which they were largely silent as institutions (with the notable exception of the Church of Scotland), they have very rapidly begun to speak about reconciliation and moving on with an absence of any analysis of the way the future will unfold. Perhaps the very least that can be done is to ensure that the Church of England bishops and other religiously linked

peers are adequately briefed for debates in the House of Lords.

Notwithstanding my pessimism, I suggest that we need to support those who want to keep the European question on the agenda both now and beyond any departure. To that end we need to press the British and Irish Churches to keep the issue alive in their own and ecumenical structures.

The ongoing negotiations between Britain and the EU

What then are the prospects for the negotiations and will there be a deal to put before Parliament later on this year?

The first phase of the negotiations on the terms for leaving was long and tortuous. It is now accepted that negotiations on future trade relations will take longer than the period allowed for by Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, thus requiring a transition period during which it seems that the EU 27 will insist that little will change – except that the UK will no longer be part of the decision-making process.

What seems so far to have emerged as a very significant plank in the Government's approach is securing the place of the City of London as the major financial centre of Europe. Alongside that there are financial players in other parts of Europe which see the opportunity to dislodge the City from that place or, at least, significantly reduce its importance to their own benefit. The EU 27 have already indicated that the City cannot be guaranteed any special treatment, so that this seems to be a very difficult negotiation.

It is also clear that a number of significant companies, particularly in the motor manufacturing and pharmaceutical sectors, are making contingency plans to ensure that they maintain access to the Single Market and the jurisdiction of bodies such as the European Medicines Agency. There is also a concern that the UK should not be cast aside from the European Atomic Energy Community. On the other hand, the EU 27 have made it clear that the UK cannot cherry-pick those parts of the European processes which suit it and cannot be in a better position as a non-member compared with members. [*Update 5 March*: The first reactions

of the EU 27 to the policy of managed divergence adopted by the Cabinet suggest that this will not be readily acceptable to them, at least not in a form which is also acceptable to the hard-line Brexiteers in the Conservative Party.]

At the same time, the UK cannot sign new trade agreements with other countries while it is still a member of the EU and, presumably, the EU 27 would want this to extend into any transition period. There is nothing to stop the UK discussing trade deals with other countries, but it seems unlikely that they will give priority to a UK market of 60 millions over negotiations with a EU market of over 450 millions (without the UK).

I suggest that our aim needs to be to press for an outcome that keeps the UK as close as possible to the EU so that the adverse effects of Brexit are minimised and so that an eventual re-entry can be effected if and when people realise that a mistake has been made.

Europe's Future

The other dimension which should concern Faith in Europe is the prospects for the EU as a whole, with or without the UK. [*Update 5 March*: Among these are the EU's response to the renewed assertiveness of Russia in European affairs and the continuing failure to find policies to respond to flows of refugees and migrants towards and within Europe.]

In addition to these, two other conflicting trends are in play.

First, there is a need to look at the way in which the euro is structured. It was set up as a purely financial construction with an emphasis on currency stability and the prevention of excessive inflation. There was little attention given to the wider political, economic and fiscal dimensions and this has been reflected in a lack of ability to react to certain economic crises and an over-emphasis on austerity. The response has been to argue for greater integration within the Euro-zone.

This conflicts with the second element, which is the rise of populism in various forms in European Union member-states coupled with a wider distrust of politicians and the political process and a distrust of experts. The Brexit phenomenon is one manifestation of this,

accompanied by a rise of nationalist and/or anti-immigrant and/or anti-Muslim parties seen in various forms in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands and Poland. These elements are opposed to further European integration and make it unlikely that governments will risk the Treaty changes which would be necessary to respond to the inadequacies of the euro structure.

The distrust of European integration felt by certain sectors of European populations was pointed out in the 1990s by the then European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS – now part of the Conference of European Churches) which suggested that, given that the European integration process up to that point had been led by political elites and based on the evidence of referenda in Denmark, France and Ireland, there was a need to involve people more widely in the process so that the European project was more widely owned. Some of the processes since then have been more participative but they have not reached deeply enough into the population – especially those parts which have been affected most by economic and social disturbances.

There is, therefore, a need to reiterate the need for a wide reflection on the purpose and process of European integration and the recovery or establishment of a positive vision of the European future. The Churches of Europe should be involved in that process and it is disappointing that the Conference of European Churches has apparently paid less and less attention to the issues of European integration in recent years, especially since the disappearance of its Church and Society Commission. This contrasts with the greater involvement of the (Catholic) Commission of Bishops' Conferences in the European Union (COMECE). The coming Assembly of CEC should be challenged to renew the work on these issues and perhaps an Open Letter from Faith in Europe to the CEC Assembly might be opportune.

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Comments and Conclusions

Brendan Donnelly

18 January 2018

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to respond to the presentations at this Faith in Europe meeting.

Response to John Arnold

I agree that Catholic Christianity was a motivating force for many of the European Union's founding fathers, but would argue that the organisation they founded should not be regarded as one based on specifically Christian values. The EU is a sophisticated and evolving political structure, founded above all on the rejection of nationalism. The rejection of nationalism is an insight by no means confined to Christians or even to believers. I would be happy to describe the EU as an ethical construct, but its philosophical attractions should be as accessible to atheists and agnostics as to the religiously committed.

Also, *pace* John, I see some important similarities between Brexit and Henry VIII's break with Rome. Both were preceded by intellectual and philosophical developments preparing the ground for change. More importantly, both were precipitated by casual circumstances: the desire of the Henry VIII to have a son in one case, and the internal turmoil of the Conservative Party in the other.

Response to Win Burton

I agree that recent British history and in particular the events of the Second World War have made it more difficult for many Britons than for many in other member-states of the EU to see the dangers of nationalism. I do believe, however, that in the 1970s and 1980s an important evolution in British attitudes was taking place, an evolution that might have made it easier for the UK to feel at ease in the EU. This evolution was first checked and then reversed by the Thatcher years, when a relative improvement in British

economic performance encouraged what I regard as a lurch towards isolationist over-confidence.

I would also argue that Win Burton's general accusation of indifference towards refugees on the part of Europe is too broadly drawn. Mrs Merkel and the Swedish government have done much to welcome refugees, and the Commission has also proposed the helpful quota system for distributing refugees within the EU. Win's criticism was justified in regard to some European governments, but not all.

I agree with Win that the British government has not yet decided what it wants the UK's relationship with the EU to be after Brexit. I think however that this is an insoluble problem, since Brexit's supporters in the UK want incoherent and unrealisable things.

Response to Richard Seebohm

I agree that there are both emotional and practical cases to be made for the UK to remain in the EU, particularly given the difficulty of disentangling 40 years of economic integration. Those in favour of Brexit have however their own emotional motivation, namely resentment of what they have been taught to regard as a foreign threat to their identity and independence emanating from the EU. It would require very strong practical arguments to overwhelm this resentment. These practical arguments will certainly gain in force as time shows the increasingly negative economic impact of Brexit. It is an open question, however, whether this negative economic impact will have manifested itself by March 2019, when Brexit is scheduled to take place. I incline to the view that later in the year Parliament might make acceptance of the Prime Minister's terms for Brexit dependent upon a further Referendum. If there were a further

Referendum, I think its outcome might well lead to the UK's remaining in the EU. This would create another series of problems for the British political system, but they would be problems that I think would be preferable to the alternative of Brexit.

Response to David Blackman

I agree that the British Government is managing the Brexit negotiations badly, but I doubt whether there is any way in which they could be managed well, given the incoherence of the whole Brexit project. I agree with David that many of the seeds of the vote for Brexit were sown in the years preceding the Referendum. 'Project Fear' in particular was a panicky attempt by the government to compensate for 20 years of populist criticism of the EU.

I attach less importance than does David to the Conservative Party's leaving the EPP group in the European Parliament. Mrs Merkel had overcome her initial irritation at that step and had done what she could to help David Cameron in his attempts to renegotiate the terms of British membership of the EU.

I agree with David about the unresolved nature of the Irish border question. I am surprised at the eventual willingness of the Irish government to accept, at the conclusion of the first phase of negotiations, so obviously incoherent a text as that agreed. No doubt the Irish government will be pressing for more clarity in the next phase of the negotiations.

I confess that I am less concerned than many commentators by the prospect of the British government's taking upon itself some 'Henry VIII powers'. There are many worse implications of Brexit than this inevitable consequence of the Brexit disruption.

Response to Keith Best

I agree that the arguments and considerations about Europe that might resonate with young people today are not and cannot be the same as those that resonated with their parents. This fact is sometimes seen as being a problem for the EU's supporters, but I have a different view. I am sure that if the UK does leave the EU in 2019 it will soon seek to

return, precisely because the mortality rates of those who supported Brexit will be so much higher than those of the young people who predominantly supported remaining in the EU. If there were another Referendum later in the year about Brexit, I think that the balance of opinion will tend against Brexit, given the confusion and incompetence surrounding the Government's attempts to bring about Brexit over the past two years.

I doubt whether the Conservative Party would be able to tolerate the relatively 'soft' Brexit that Keith predicts. I believe that the UK will either leave the EU in the most chaotic and disruptive way possible, or will stay in the EU.

Response to Keith Archer

The intellectual and personal evolution that Keith has described, away from British nationalism towards European engagement, was one that many people had undergone in the 1960s and 1970s. That was the background for our being able to join the EU in 1973. It was ironic that 70 years after the end of the Second World War some Britons were more inclined to believe consoling myths about the War than had been the case in the 1960s and 1970s. Winston Churchill had claimed that history would be kind to him because he would write the history. Amazingly, some contemporary commentators were more inclined to take the mythic Churchillian narrative of the Second World War at face value than had been the case 20 years before.

I agree with Keith that Hungary and the Eurozone pose difficult problems for the EU, at least as difficult as the problems posed by Brexit. I doubt, however, whether Hungary could afford to leave the EU even if it wanted to. I believe that eventually the problems of the Eurozone will resolve themselves in a more integrated single currency area, in which eventually the UK will join, perhaps sooner than appears plausible today.

Response to Keith Jenkins

I agree that the approach of both main parties to Brexit is worryingly incoherent. It was the internal divisions of the Conservative Party that led to the holding of the EU Referendum in the first place. The outcome of that

Referendum now means that the majority of the Conservative Parliamentary Party that had wished to remain in the EU is now condemned to carrying out a policy in which it does not believe and is trying by pursuing a relatively 'soft' Brexit to minimise the harm it sees likely to arise from the UK's leaving the EU. A powerful and self-confident Conservative minority in the House of Commons believes on the other hand that a 'clean break' from the EU will be economically and politically advantageous to the UK. On the Labour side, its leader Jeremy Corbyn has a long personal history of opposition to the EU. This opposition is not shared by most of his parliamentary colleagues, but he has found some common ground with those MPs from traditional Labour-voting constituencies in which many Labour voters voted for Brexit, sometimes for reasons only tangentially related to the real effect of the EU on their lives.

I repeat my prediction that the most likely outcome of this generalised confusion will be a further Referendum on the EU, sparked by a parliamentary rejection of the terms negotiated by the Conservative government for British withdrawal from the EU.

I agree with Keith that further reflection on the future of the EU is necessary and appropriate. I doubt, however, whether British voices will be able to play any substantial role in that reflection until the issue of Brexit is resolved.

Final remarks

I stress the importance of the Irish border question in the future of the Brexit negotiations. The agreement on Ireland which concluded the first phase of negotiations was incoherent and might well be incapable of implementation. I suggest that a further Referendum on the EU might be easier for the pro-EU forces to win than is currently assumed. Opinion polls taken now will not necessarily be shown as accurate in the future, after months of unsuccessful negotiation and further political turmoil in the Conservative Party. I believe that the Conservative Party is not capable of agreeing internally upon pursuing a 'soft' Brexit, for instance by remaining in the Customs Union and/or the Single European Market.

My concluding thought is that the UK will either leave the EU in the most radical or disruptive way possible, or that it will remain in the EU because the alternative is so much more frightening. This latter outcome would be far from ideal, but to my mind the problems it would generate would be less than those generated by any realistic alternative.

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