

RANDOM THOUGHTS ON EUROPE

I am unable to attend the plenary session of the Bishops' Conference in Leeds because of ill health. I have, however, in the light of the discussion on the referendum, tried to put together a few random thoughts. There are basically three parts to this. Firstly what will the EU attempt (or should attempt) to do in the future. Secondly some stray comments on matters which may or may not concern the Church, and then possibly a way forward for us in England and Wales.

It is obvious that the EU is in need of serious reform, but that can only happen from within. The renegotiation that the UK has been through is nothing like what is needed. In fact it is a missed opportunity.

What the EU is going to do in the next five years or more

(None of these ideas could be used publically in their present form as they are not concrete enough.)

1. 1957 that trade is seen as a means to peace and not peace as a means to trade. The EU was founded to try to prevent war in Europe, and everything else was secondary to this. It has been successful in stopping war between its member states since 1945. It can therefore be said that the EU today has a long experience of creating peace and therefore a vocation to promote peace in our world. The conflicts which are now taking place in the Middle East and Africa are of major importance to all of us, and we should not be withdrawing from one of the main actors in these matters. This is not in the first place a matter of finance or of structures. It is a matter of policy coherence and also a firm commitment to the values of the EU. (Cf. article 2 of The Treaty of the European Union). This has been stated as one of the prime goals of the new Commission under Jean-Claude Juncker
2. Since 2012 the EU has adopted a range of guidelines and toolkits referring to the promotion of human rights. This moves on the work of the Council of Europe (whose jurisdiction the UK is also talking about leaving) and could give it legal force which the Council of Europe cannot do. The Social Teaching of the Church reiterates the importance of the protection and respect for Human Rights which "derive directly from the dignity of the human person" etc. (*Pacem in Terris* John XXIII article 145) We need to be very actively supporting the new European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief. We cannot support this from outside. This could be a major initiative in matters concerning freedom of religion.
3. Trade seems to be the main part of the discussion on the referendum in the UK. Some clarity would seem to be needed. Since the Treaty of Rome in 1957

(long before UK membership) the European Commission holds an exclusive mandate in defining trade policy for the EU. There are basically three forms of treaty: bilateral, regional and multilateral. Since the Lisbon treaty, however, the European Parliament has gained the right to decide these matters together with the European Council. This means that this major area is totally under democratic control. (The Council is made up of the elected heads of states and we all elect the members of the EU parliament.) The Church recognises that “trade rules notwithstanding their technical appearance have a political and social dimension with deep and lasting consequences in the life of humanity,” She also stresses that “trade should benefit people, not just markets and economies.” She also favours a multilateral trade system “which will have been truly accomplished when poor countries are able to integrate fully in the international community.” (All quotes from Ethical Guidelines for International trade. Note of the Holy See. September 2003). It is also clear from the discussions before

This document is getting too long, but other key areas where we as a nation and the Catholic Church should be playing a much more prominent role are the Common Security and Defence Policy (not least in the area of small arms); the European Neighbourhood policy (not working at all well, as we see from the refugee crisis) and the Development Policy particularly for the coming 5 years.

Other Areas of Concern

Leaving the EU will mean that there will have to be border controls between the North of Ireland and the Republic, with all that that will mean. Also many of the “peace initiatives” in the North of Ireland are financed by the EU. So far I have not seen any evidence that the UK government is willing to take responsibility for these matters.

Immigration will become an even bigger question than today. Once outside the EU there is no reason why neighbouring countries (France, Belgium and the Netherlands) should wish to cooperate with Britain on keeping the UK borders, as the UK seems to want them. (I am aware that the agreement between France and the UK is bilateral and would not necessarily be changed by the UK leaving the EU.) History tells us again and again that building larger fences and walls or introducing more stringent checks never, other than for a short period, will stop people moving who feel impelled to do so. Most of you will have seen the pictures of people swimming a river and cutting razor wire to get into Macedonia and so come to western Europe. I am awaiting the pictures in the next six months of people who have been returned to Turkey by force, and the suicides which may easily follow from the new policy. The Church has said since at least the nineties that this type of a wave of immigrants would happen. Basically once it achieves these proportions it

cannot be stopped. There is no reason to believe that the UK on its own would be any better at stopping the flow of refugees than the EU has been.

It has to be asked whether the UK would be able to stay part of such arrangements as the Bologna Process and all that has meant for students, not least poorer ones giving them international experience, and also giving many experience of a Catholic ethos.

A Way Forward

I have tried to give some of the more principled reasons why I, looking to the future, and not just analysing the past, would want to stay in the EU. It would be difficult for the Bishops' Conference to publically enter into this debate. If we wish to do more than just encourage people to vote then could I suggest that any statement is limited to Papal teaching? There is plenty of it! It is also easily found by entering 'European Union' or 'Europe' into the Vatican website.

It is of course Catholic Social Teaching which is at the EU's basis, and therefore could be taken back to Leo XIII. More directly it can begin with several addresses of Pius XII e.g. *Discorso di Sua Santità Pio PP XII, ai Partecipanti al Congresso D'Europa*. (June 1957) We have received a number of encyclicals and also addresses to various international bodies up to Pope Francis' addresses in Strasbourg, and the call for international cooperation in *Laudato Si*, where it is quite clear that the Pope sees that environmental issues and climate change can only be handled at an international level. To this can be added the documents of Vatican II, which emphasise unity in diversity, not only for the Church itself but also for the wider social fabric.

Please feel free to ignore this if it is not helpful. I am very aware that I am a Europhile. I have tried with the self-imposed limit of two pages to give some of the principles as to why I hold the opinions I do. I think that our world is moving away from the nation-state as it moved earlier from the city-state, and that we will move to larger conglomerations of what we now call states. I do not expect to see all of that in my life-time, but I still find the words of the Schumann declaration from 1950 inspiring.

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