

# **The Anglican-Lutheran Society Annual General Meeting**

Anglican Pro-Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, Brussels

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## **‘New Ecumenical Challenges in Europe’**

*A Presentation by the Rt Rev Dr Robert Innes, Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe*

### **Introduction**

It's a great pleasure to welcome you here to Brussels where I've lived for the last ten and a half years or so. I was Chancellor of this Pro-Cathedral for nine years and I've been Bishop of the Diocese in Europe for the last 18 months. I was a pupil of the Anglican President of the Society, Dr John Arnold, who introduced me to ecumenical theology and one of the things I remember him saying to us in one of our lectures was, 'When the Church is looking for economies the last thing you should cut is the travel budget, following the example of St Paul whose ministry was entirely travelling.' That stuck with me and now I find myself travelling probably more than any other bishop except perhaps the Archbishop of Canterbury. I have a diocese with about 40 countries across Europe and I spend about five days out of seven away from home which is possible because our children are away from home and my wife can often travel with me.

What I'm going to say intersects with Heikki's very wise reflections this morning. I'm going to take a little look at the recent history of Europe, look at some of the challenges facing Europe and reflect about where we're going. I work here in Brussels which is the administrative centre of the European Union so I do tend to see things from an EU perspective which is probably different from some of you. One of the most significant points of my lifetime, and a convenient starting point for starting to think about things, began here. The picture shows the interior of St Nicholas Church, Leipzig (*Nikolaikirche*), the place where the peaceful revolution of the 1980s in East Germany began. The courageous parish priest, Christian Führer, opened up a weekly dialogue with prayers for peace each Monday evening. These dialogues and prayers attracted large crowds, so many that the church, which is huge with 2000 seats, could barely contain them. From September 1989 the peace prayers resulted in the so-called 'Monday Demonstrations' with thousands of people holding candles and showing banners. The authorities tried to control the demonstrations using road blocks and stationing soldiers on the streets but without success. The number of protestors grew until, on 9th October 1989, about 70,000 demonstrators came together in the centre of Leipzig and faced 8,000 armed soldiers. Given the number of demonstrators the police dared not shoot and the process then quickly spread throughout the whole of East Germany leading to the opening of borders on 9th November and the fall of the communist regime. And that was something I had never expected. I had grown up in the shadow of the Cold War and the Midnight Clock which changed each Christmas showing how far from nuclear devastation they thought we were. That was part of my youthful reality. It all changed in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall. A member of the Stasi, commenting on the events in Leipzig, said, 'Our security was comprehensive, we had been prepared for every eventuality, but we were not prepared for prayers and for candles.'

After 1989 and the ending of a bi-polar world Europe opened vistas of freedom and hope for millions of people. There was a sense of excitement about the future. The healing of wounds and divisions in Europe became a central story. And, noting that the European Community was at a turning point, the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, envisaged that states would be called upon to create a new European border. The European Union seemed to him the world's most powerful invention for advancing peace - Europe reunited in diversity. Delors invited the Churches and the political community more widely to strive for peace, justice and solidarity as the core values of a new Europe. Delors was not content that Europe should just be a matter of economics, it is, he thought, not just about markets but values and culture. Europe had to promote

a new sense of belonging. So in 1990 Delors rather famously told the Churches, 'We need a heart and soul. The door is now open to anyone who can offer a heart and a soul.' So the Churches were invited to be part of that process of creating a soul for Europe. Delors offered regular informal meetings between the Churches and officials of the European Commission which eventually led to a legal commitment on the part of the European Union to maintain an open, regular and transparent dialogue with the Churches and non-confessional organisations. This provision was built into the 2007 Lisbon Treaty and there is now an annual high-level dialogue between top officials in the Institutions and senior religious leaders.

Well, the years following 1989 witnessed both the widening and the deepening of the European Community. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 provided for a single currency, the Euro. The Treaties in Amsterdam in 1997 and Nice in 2001 paved the way for enlargement of the Community; the Lisbon Treaty of 2007 gave the European Union a European Council of Presidents and a high representative for foreign affairs. Christian influence on the project varied in its strength. In 2003 Giscard d'Estaing, the Chairman of the Convention on a New European Constitution, famously rejected mention in the preamble to the projected Constitution not only to God but also in the influence of Christianity on European history. So there was a sense that, although it had begun with very explicit Christian values in its foundation after the Second World War, the Community was becoming a secular institution. In 2014 Pope Francis addressed the Parliament of the European Community in Strasbourg and he expressed concern that Europe was no longer open to the transcendent dimension of life. It risked losing both its own soul and the humanistic spirit which is still loved and defended. The Pope recalled the 2000 years of history linking Europe and Christianity. He acknowledged that that history was not free of conflicts and errors and sins but he also saw in it much that was beautiful, reflected in the architecture of Europe's great cities. 'Europe,' he said, 'urgently needs to recover its true features in order to grow, as its founders intended, in peace and harmony since it is not yet free from conflicts.' He famously portrayed Europe as an ageing lady needing to recover her features of youthful beauty, which was a powerful image.

The following year, 2015, proved to be a year of grave challenges for the European Union, and I'm going to mention three, and the first is the challenge of migration.

### **The Challenge of Migration**

We are facing the largest movement of peoples since the Second World War, and this movement is complex. It's about people moving from East to West and it's also about refugees moving in from Africa and the Middle East. It's widely referred to as 'a migration crisis' and it's a crisis that, if you're in the United Kingdom, confronts you every day on your televisions, in your newspapers and in political discourse. Many people in Britain seem to think that the United Kingdom has been specially targeted by migrants. I know that at first hand because a couple of days ago the Archbishop of Canterbury published an article in the house magazine of the House of Commons in which he said that we need to recognise the fear which migration is causing in the United Kingdom. That phrase was picked up immediately by the press who rejoiced that the Archbishop at last had recognised that migration was fearful and I was asked by two news channels to do an interview on that subject yesterday evening. Of course, what the Archbishop actually said and what was reported was rather different. He was wanting to say, Yes, people are fearful and there are reasons for that – they're worried about jobs, health services and so on, but that we in the Church are agents of hope and we want to encourage people to look at how well we've integrated migrants in the past and what we can do in the future, and that we need to be taking more migrants. But that part of his article was not reported.

But migration is a huge concern and it's not just in the UK. I was in Hungary last weekend and there concern about migration is of a rather different style and character. When I spoke to Cardinal Erdő, the head of the Roman Catholic Church there, and asked him what the biggest problem is in Hungary, he said, 'Our biggest problem is emigration. It is the loss of a whole generation of younger professional people. They are going to places like London and Germany.' And that gives this

movement of peoples another twist because, for all that people in Britain complain about all these people 'taking our jobs' it's much worse if you're losing your young people and you have no doctors. So migration is a real challenge, and some factors sometimes get lost in the migration debate.

First of all, it's important to remind ourselves that birth rates across Europe have been declining for many years so there is a decline in the number of young people of what we call traditional regional origin. The population is ageing. Countries like Germany need more younger people to work.

Second, Europe is very rich. The European Union has been a pole of attraction for many people for over 50 years because of our economic prosperity and because our economic model has paid attention, at least to some degree, in sharing the benefits of that wealth. So it's attractive. But beyond our frontiers we find in too many countries political and economic and ecological disaster. We find growing populations with little hope of a good future for their families. We have failed to export our successes to large swathes of the neighbouring world. Nor can we, especially those of us who are former colonial powers, deny at least a share of responsibility for their problems. The more history you read the more you become aware of that because our colonial manipulation and, more recently, our greed for their oil, have been at the root of many of today's conflicts. Migration won't just go away. The painful reality is that we have to learn to live with it, and I believe that Europe together needs to manage the problem. How can Europe together manage migration so that we receive people safely and integrate people at a rate we can cope with? The absolute numbers, as Heikki reminded us this morning, are not massive. If we were in Lebanon the numbers relative to our population would be massive but they're not when compared to the whole population of Europe. But so far we've not managed this very well. So in the immediate term migration threatens the Schengen Agreement and the free movement of peoples which has been one of the European Union's great successes. Just in the last few months it has become more difficult to travel round Europe. You have to show your passport more often and there are more checks, security and so on. So the future of free movement is very much in the balance and if it goes there will be a massive cost – billions of Euros a year.

### **The Challenge of Debt**

One of the things that really strikes me is the huge gulf between the levels of prosperity between the north and south of Europe. It's like being in two different continents. Germany and Scandinavia run deeply impressive economies. Things really work, there are lots of shiny new things around and the trains run on time. It's very different in southern Italy and Spain where youth unemployment has been running at 40%.

And the trials of Greece as it tries to negotiate its indebtedness, though they may have fallen from the headlines recently, are both disturbing and distressing. A 30% decrease in Gross National Product such as Greece has known does not work out as a 30% reduction for all – far from it. It has left many, many people in poverty and our church in Athens has for a few years now shared in running soup kitchens in the centre of Athens for Greeks who are hungry. *Apostoli*, the Greek Orthodox Church's relief agency, is caring for thousands of people across Greece who are Greek and who are poor and have no money. And that's before you start thinking about the refugees. The problem of sovereign debt, and especially Greek sovereign debt, is still very much there and it threatens the common currency, the Euro, which has been another huge achievement of the European Union.

### **The Challenge presented by the Rise of Popularist Parties**

There are a number of parties across Europe who are united in one thing, which is that they don't like the European Union. In a world that is becoming increasingly global, populations are turning inwards and looking to assert their local identity. And very often this is expressed as hostility towards outsiders and outside authorities, be that in the form of migrants or legislation imposed by Brussels. Herman Van Rompuy, who was the deeply Christian former President of the European Council, described popularism as the greatest danger to Europe. It's not linked to one side of the

political spectrum or the other, there are left-wing parties and right-wing parties, but they are united in their distrust of central European institutions and in championing local, national identity. You have the United Kingdom Independence Party in Great Britain, the National Front in France and SYRIZA in Greece, for example. So this is a challenge to maintain confidence in central political institutions in the face of growing popularism and nationalism.

Those are three massive challenges. The European Union is undoubtedly facing a severer challenge than anything I've known since the fall of the Berlin Wall. So it is a difficult time and we don't know how the European Union will survive, or even if it will survive.

### **The Diocese in Europe**

I'd like to change tack for a moment and talk about my diocese, the Diocese in Europe. The Christian map of Europe is dominated by the Roman Catholic Church in the south, the Protestant Churches in north and the Orthodox Churches in the east. But there have been English Christians living and worshipping on the continent since the Reformation. William Tyndale, who was responsible for much of the text of the King James' Bible, did much of his work here in Belgium, in Antwerp, and was eventually martyred at Vilvoorde near Brussels. Our church in Hamburg recently celebrated its 400th anniversary and in Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, Greece and Hungary our churches have official state recognition. There is state funding for our churches in Belgium, Luxembourg and Hungary.

Our Diocese includes seven Archdeaconries and has much the biggest land area of the 42 Church of England Dioceses and a quarter of the Anglican Communion's countries are in this diocese. And we are a minority Church, of course, in every country in which we operate and that gives us a very different outlook from the Lutheran Church in Germany or Finland or the Church of England in England.

I do believe that Anglicans have an important part to play in the ecumenical life of the continent. We are members of the Conference of European Churches in our own right as a distinctive stream and as a church which, at its best, can claim to be both catholic and reformed we can frequently be a bridge church in dialogue. Here in this city there are Anglicans in all kinds of interesting and prominent places. We work together with our partners from the American Episcopal Church. One of the features of our Church, and one of the strategies of our Diocese, is reconciliation. The task of reconciliation is never done. This is a picture of me leading worship in our church in Leipzig. The original Anglican church in Leipzig was destroyed by the Royal Air Force in the Second World War. We destroyed quite a lot of our churches in Germany. It's now a building site and they are building an accommodation block on it. We borrow another church building and have lively international congregations worshipping in both English and German and we have excellent relationships with the Lutheran authorities. In December last year (2015) I was invited to lead a Nine Lessons and Carol Service at the *Frauenkirche* in Dresden where we hold a monthly English-speaking service. The *Frauenkirche* was reduced to ruins in the fire storm created by the Allied bombers in World War Two. It has been most beautifully restored by donations both from Germany and the United Kingdom, which is a fine example of ecumenical friendship and this year we celebrate the 10th anniversary of its new incarnation.

The Anglican Church in Europe was once the preserve of ex-patriot British but nowadays it's highly international and diverse. This is a picture of a confirmation I conducted at the beginning of the year in Eindhoven in the Netherlands. The candidates included two very bright young girls from India, a young female electrical engineer from Sierra Leone and a young man, a migrant converted from Islam, from Pakistan. The clergy assisting me were from New Zealand and the Netherlands. The highest percentage of people in the congregation is Dutch followed by Indians – there is only a handful of English. I'm told that ours is the only English speaking church in the south Netherlands with a full-time pastor.

Churches across our diocese have been actively involved in the refugee crisis. You may remember that for a while the main railway station in Budapest was one of the hot spots, and members of our church collected and dispersed thousands of basic hygiene and survival kits. We have been working with refugees in Athens for many years and in this picture you can see Fr Malcolm Bradshaw visiting refugees in Athens Victoria Square where all the traffic gathers to help people move north. In another picture you can see an Afghan refugee whose story is typical. He came across from Turkey to a Greek island in one of the little boats. He said that altogether it had cost him £4,000 to get to Greece. 'We sacrificed everything to get here because there is no future for us in Iran and our home country, Afghanistan is too dangerous,' he said. 'The risk of being killed by the Taliban is now too high. The way to Germany will be difficult. We are travelling with my niece who is very young and it is getting very cold.'

### **Some Reflections on Brexit**

A few months ago I was on a platform with Romano Prodi, the former President of the European Commission. He said to me, 'When I came to Brussels I didn't know whether the prevailing administrative culture would be German or French. To my surprise it was neither – it was British.' He knew pretty quickly with the French and the Germans which political party they were from but with the British he never knew. His point was that the British brought to the European Union a very high level of professionalism and administrative expertise. That meant that they exerted an influence much greater than their compatriots sometimes realised. And that is why it is particularly tragic when so much of that influence is being given away, and the confidence has been lost. And it has!

Now, as a bishop of the Church my role is not to offer political solutions but the sad thing is that a lot of the talk about Europe in the United Kingdom is conducted at a pathetically low level. An otherwise reasonable and charming man recently confided in me that officials in Brussels had hundreds of thousands of regulations already prepared and were just waiting to launch them on an unsuspecting United Kingdom! Among these was a plan to abolish all British local government in the south-east of the United Kingdom and merge it with France, the new area to be known as *Manche*! I have no idea where he got that idea from, but it illustrates the level of the ideas that are going around. There is a great deal of myth, hyperbole and nonsense. Much of the debate about Brexit is on economics – would we be better off or not if we were in the Union or out of it? That cannot be an adequate Christian contribution. For me the critical question is whether we British are prepared to play a part in Europe for the benefit of the common good. Are we committed to the founding European values of reconciliation, peace-making, neighbourliness, solidarity which inspired the creation of this enterprise? Can we put our shoulder to the wheel in helping to offer Europe the leadership it desperately needs at this critical time in its history, or are we happy to opt out and leave everything to others? Britain famously has an island mentality and that becomes ever more evident when you don't live on the island so I want to finish with the well-known words from John Donne who had a great influence on the civilised development of the Anglican Church. He represents the voice of an island people and his words offer hope to all of us as Europe contemplates its future, and especially to the Christian Church as we aspire to our particular vocation to be the soul of Europe:

*No man is an island entire of itself.*

*Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the maine.*

*If a clod be washed away by the sea Europe is the less as well as if a promontory were as well as any of thy friends or of thine own were.*

*Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind.*

*Therefore, never send to know for whom the bells tolls: it tolls for thee.*