

FOSTERING A COMMUNITY OF VALUES

Pastoral Reflection from the Catholic Bishops of Ireland on the occasion of the referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon

"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain" (*Ps 127:1*).

1. Promoting active citizenship

As Ireland prepares for the referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon we, the Catholic Bishops' Conference welcome the opportunity to present this Pastoral Reflection as our contribution to the debate.

Conscious of the significance for Irish citizens and indeed for all those living in the EU of the impending referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon, we welcome and associate ourselves with the call from the leadership of the other main Christian Churches on the island of Ireland for 'all Christians to take the time and to make the effort to study and reflect prayerfully on the contents of the Treaty ... [and] to vote, which is their right and privilege.' We are both Irish citizens and Europeans, and on matters of important public policy such as that reflected in the Treaty of Lisbon, there is a responsibility on all of us to exercise our franchise by casting our ballot.¹

Conscious of the pressure from powerful interest groups in Ireland and in other parts of the EU to influence the outcome of the referendum, we ask also that the right of people to exercise their franchise freely be respected. People have the right to cast their vote without feeling unduly pressurised. Furthermore, we condemn unreservedly those who would seek to influence the outcome of the referendum either by offering misleading or even patently incorrect advice or by introducing extraneous factors into the debate. In this context, it should be stressed that this is a referendum on the merits of a particular treaty; it is not a referendum to assess our views on membership of the European Union or to register a protest vote on an issue unrelated to the merits or otherwise of the Treaty of Lisbon.

In deciding how to exercise one's vote one should do so in the light of an acknowledgement of the distinctive roles of politics and religion and an acceptance of the legitimate autonomy of the political order. As Pope Benedict XVI states, "The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics...."²

The Treaty of Lisbon has been drawn up in the light of the enlargement of the EU from a community of fifteen states at the turn of the millennium to one of twenty seven states today.

¹ "It is commendable that in today's democratic societies, in a climate of true freedom, everyone is made a participant in directing the body politic. Such societies call for new and fuller forms of participation in public life by Christian and non-Christian citizens alike. ... The life of a democracy could not be productive without the active, responsible and generous involvement of everyone", *Doctrinal note on some questions regarding the Participation of Catholics in the Political life*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Vatican, 24 November 2002.

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, section 28. In a commentary on this text Archbishop Diarmuid Martin states "This should not be interpreted as an abdication of social responsibility on the part of the Church rather, what it does, is to give recognition to the legitimate autonomy of the political order" in Archbishop Martin's *Address to the National Forum on Europe*, "The Values underpinning European Integration", in Dublin Castle on the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, 8 January 2007. See also Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, "A Shared Humanism based on Solidarity", *The Common Good in an Unequal World: Reflections on the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Veritas, Dublin, 2007, 121 – 128.

An enlargement of this scale poses significant challenges at both an administrative and at a political level that call for appropriate institutional reform which the Treaty of Lisbon attempts to address. If we are to avoid institutional gridlock, the EU must implement improved methods of decision making – it cannot continue ‘business as usual.’

In addition, the Treaty of Lisbon is prompted by the need for institutional reform that will equip the EU to continue to play a positive role in a rapidly changing world. The importance of this issue is highlighted by the increasing impact of globalisation on all areas of economic life.

Finally, there is a growing recognition of the difficulties experienced by citizens in all the member states in identifying with and engaging in the European project, something reflected in the low turnout for European elections. In consequence, there is a need for institutional reform that both promotes democracy and contributes to a greater transparency and accountability on the part of EU institutions. The Treaty of Lisbon attempts to address this democratic deficit and to promote a culture of engagement that fosters the ideal of active citizenship.

The extent to which the Treaty of Lisbon successfully addresses these and other related challenges is open to debate. What is important is that we inform ourselves of the issues involved and make our decision wisely. There is a lot of information available that can be accessed quite easily by logging on to the web site of the National Forum on Europe or by contacting the various Political Parties or the Referendum Commission. As members of a community we have responsibilities to our neighbours. By failing to vote in the referendum we do them a disservice.

2. Europe: a community of values

In examining the merits of the Treaty of Lisbon one is inevitably drawn to reflect on the values which underpin the European project. The temptation is to conceive of the EU or Europe exclusively under the rubric of an economic entity. However, let us not be under any illusions, a community that is founded on purely economic self interest will not last. Furthermore, the predominance of economic considerations in contemporary political discourse should not blind us to the reality that Europe is also a civilization, the values of which are not merely repositories of cultural memory.³ The occasion of the referendum is an opportunity to remind ourselves about the values that animated those who founded the European Economic Community – a European project, which in the space of only fifty years has grown into the European Union that we know today.

What is little adverted to is the manner in which the vision of a Europe living in harmony was influenced by the Christian faith of many of these leading figures.⁴ The West German

³ “Nowadays we hear much of the “European model of life”. The term refers to a social order which combines a sound economy with social justice, political pluralism with tolerance, generosity and openness, but also means the preservation of the values which have made this continent what it is. This model, under the pressure of modern economic forces, faces a great challenge”. *Address of Pope Benedict XVI - Meeting with the Authorities and the diplomatic corps. Vienna 7 September 2007*

⁴ “For many of its founders the Christian imprint on the European project has been an indisputable fact. On this basis they engaged in the European project with the ambition to bring peace to the continent, to overcome the division of Europe and to promote the well-being of its people. This ambition was deeply rooted in a set of common values with respect for human dignity at its core. This respect of human dignity served as the basis for promoting the protection of human rights, the rule of law, solidarity, subsidiarity and democracy. These values correspond to Catholic social teaching which, too, is built on human dignity and the common good. As the process of European integration has evolved, these values and ambitions have further concretised around the concept of a community of rights.”, *Common Values – the living source of the European project*, A contribution of COMECE

Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Italian statesman Alcide De Gasperi and French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman were not only committed Catholics but they also recognised the manner in which Catholic social teaching could contribute to a new Europe, one that was founded on respect for human dignity and the promotion of the common good. From the very beginning, their vision of an economic community was inspired by the ideal of solidarity rather than the desire to promote economic growth as an end in itself.⁵

Emerging in the aftermath of the catastrophe of two world wars that had left almost 60 million dead and caused economic hardships on a vast scale, the founders of the European project believed in the possibility of healing the ravages of war and promoting peace through political, economic and social co-operation. Fifty years of relative peace within the borders of the European Union is a fitting tribute to the validity of their intuition and the inspiring nature of their leadership. As Pope Benedict XVI stated in the course of a recent address, “If ... on some points justified criticisms can be raised about certain European institutions, the process of unification remains a most significant achievement which has brought a period of peace, heretofore unknown, to this continent, formerly consumed by constant conflicts and fatal fratricidal wars..”⁶

3. Europe’s Christian heritage

The strong bonds that have shaped the bonds between Ireland and the continent of Europe are reflected in the life of that great sixth century Irish missionary St. Columbanus (Columban) who was one of the first writers to refer to Europe as a continental reality: *Totius europae*. Robert Schuman described Columbanus as ‘a patron saint for all involved in the construction of a unified Europe’. These spiritual and cultural ties are a reminder to us both of the Christian heritage of Europe and also about the manner in which these values have the potential to re-animate Europe to be a force for good in our rapidly changing world. As the late Pope John Paul II stated, “Europe has succeeded in tearing down the walls which disfigured her. She has committed herself to planning and creating a new reality capable of combining unity and diversity, national sovereignty and joint activity, economic progress and social justice. This new Europe is the bearer of the values which have borne fruit for two thousand years in an “art” of thinking and living from which the whole world has benefited. Among these values Christianity holds a privileged position, in as much as it gave birth to a humanism which has permeated Europe’s history and institutions.”⁷

Speaking to diplomats and authorities in 2007 in Vienna, Pope Benedict XVI noted that: “The ‘European home’, as we readily refer to the community of this continent, will be a good place to live for everyone only if it is built on a solid cultural and moral foundation of common values drawn from our history and our traditions. Europe cannot and must not deny her Christian roots. These represent a dynamic component of our civilization as we move forward into the third millennium”. While acknowledging that the preamble to the Treaty includes a reference to Europe’s ‘cultural, religious and humanist inheritance’⁸, it is regrettable that there is no explicit recognition of the Christian heritage of Europe in the

(Commission of the Bishops Conferences of the European Community) to the preparation of the Berlin Declaration, 24 November 2006, section 2.

⁵Catholic social teaching understands solidarity to be an ideal that is marked by ‘a willingness to give oneself for the good of one’s neighbour, beyond any individual or particular interest. See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 194

⁶ Address of Pope Benedict XVI, Vienna, 7 September 2007

⁷ Address of Pope John Paul II to the Diplomatic Corps, 13 January 2003

⁸ Article 1.1a. reads as follows: ‘Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.’

Treaty. However, in keeping with the spirit of the founders of the European project, the aims and aspirations that underpin initiatives in the EU in many respects reflect the Christian humanist vision of the good of society.⁹ For example, Article 1.4 of the Treaty of Lisbon includes a commitment to promote full employment, social progress and a high standard of environmental protection alongside respect for the rich cultural and linguistic diversity in the member states. It also includes a commitment to promote social justice and protection, equality between men and women, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child, and to combat social marginalisation and discrimination in whatever form it may take.

4. What kind of Europe do we want for our children?

The occasion of the referendum provides an opportunity to reflect on the type of Europe we would like to bequeath to our children and grandchildren. Unquestionably, our membership of the EU over the past thirty five years has benefited us economically. Arguably, it has also benefited us culturally, in that it has allowed us to reconnect with our European neighbours in ways that were not previously possible owing to the particularities of our history. Whatever the merits of that argument, the challenge facing us now is to discern how to contribute to the demands of a new and enlarged European community based on shared values of which future generations will be proud. In meeting this challenge, one must acknowledge the many ideals that reflect the complex set of relations that constitute our moral environment. In the light of the changing cultural profile of Ireland today the following three are worthy of particular mention.

Firstly, there is the importance of imparting the truth of the conviction that values, which enframe the human project, are objective. Pope Benedict has on a number of occasions referred to what he describes as ‘the dictatorship of relativism’ that is endangering civilization.¹⁰ If values are perceived to be purely subjective, and if we lose sight of the existence of an objective horizon of meaning within which to evaluate our lives, we run the risk of fostering a cultural ethos which defies strength. That is a very bleak environment within which to order one’s life and the life of society.

Secondly, on the sixtieth anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights there is the challenge of fostering in Europe a renewed respect for human rights particularly the right of people to live free from the fear of violence. In the face of the alarming increase in the well documented incidences of violent crime in Irish society, we cannot remain on the sidelines. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord recalls the commandment, ‘You shall not kill’, and adds to it the proscription of anger, hatred and vengeance. Going further, Christ asks his disciples to turn the other cheek, to love their enemies. The mandate of the Gospel demands that we speak out against violence in all its manifestations. We need too to examine more deeply the causes of such violence. It is for all of us to take the steps necessary at both national and European level to promote a just and peaceful society.

⁹ “The European project has an ethical basis, and this precedes political union. This ethical foundation derives from the origins and sources of our common values and ambitions. These historical origins are to be found in the Christian and humanistic heritage of our continent. Moreover, for a majority of EU citizens their Christian faith is the living source for their support of our common values and ambitions.” *Common Values – the living source of the European project*, COMECE 24 November 2006

¹⁰ See the following extract from the final pre-conclave homily in April 2005 of Pope Benedict XVI: “A dictatorship of relativism is being formed, one that recognizes nothing as definitive and that has as its measure only the self and its desires.” See also the following extract from Pope Benedict XVI’s homily at the Mass to conclude the ceremonies to mark World Youth Day, Cologne, in August 2005, “Freedom is not simply about enjoying life in total autonomy, but rather about living by the measure of truth and goodness, so that we ourselves can become true and good, ...”

Thirdly, there is the challenge of fostering an ethic of global solidarity. Over the past decade, a major challenge that has faced European society has been to respond appropriately to the reality of Globalisation. For us in Ireland, its imprint is very clearly to be seen in the emergence of a multi-cultural societal profile. Globalisation is going to provide a major challenge for those entrusted with leadership roles in Europe over the course of the foreseeable future. In the light of this reality, it is important that a number of values are prioritised. There is the need to ensure respect for the rights of immigrants and asylum seekers. We must also promote an ethic of global solidarity that would promote the adoption across all EU countries of generous aid budgets and accord priority to addressing urgent humanitarian concerns wherever they exist. Finally, we need to promote sustainable development that will both protect the environment and improve the living standards of the inhabitants of the underdeveloped world.

Without doubt challenges to this common vision will emerge in Ireland and from within the structures in the European Union. In a climate of legal positivism attempts may well be made to use traditional language concerning human dignity in ways which are contrary to traditional sense. Court decisions on a national or EU level tend to interpret language. Administrative decisions may well tend to opt for particular interpretations of norms. It is to be hoped that our public representatives will make a public commitment to engage actively with a broad coalition across the EU to resist interventions of this kind and to combat attempts to weaken the sense of subsidiarity which is an essential dimension of the Treaty of Lisbon. We also appeal to the Courts to respect the ethical values of human dignity that have been the sustaining pillars of European Culture.

5. Edith Stein (St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross): Co-Patroness of Europe

In July 1942 the Catholic bishops of Holland issued a Pastoral Letter condemning the forced removal of Jews from Catholic schools and the deportation of Jewish families to Poland. In reprisal, the Nazi authorities ordered the forced deportation of all Catholics of Jewish origin, including members of religious orders. On August 2nd Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism and member of a Carmelite community in Holland, was arrested and sent to Auschwitz where one week later she died in the gas chambers.

So much of Edith Stein's life and death was to highlight the tragedy that befell Europe during this period, one of countless millions destroyed by the racism and xenophobia that characterized the scourge of Nazism. How distant must this world appear to us as we prepare for the referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon, and yet we should never forget that the European project was conceived in the aftermath of this obscenity. The Holocaust is a sobering reminder to us of the fragility of civilization. The convictions, the vigilance and the responsible engagement of citizens will always be important to ensure that Europe continues to be built 'on the basis of authentic values, which are founded on the universal moral law written on the heart of every person.'¹¹

¹¹ Address of Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the proclamation of Edith Stein (Saint Theresa Benedicta of the Cross) as Co-Patroness of Europe. The full quotation reads, "In order to build the new Europe on solid foundations it is certainly not enough to appeal to economic interests alone; for these, while sometimes bringing people together, are at other times a cause of division. Rather there is a need to act on the basis of authentic values, which are founded on the universal moral law written on the heart of every person. A Europe which would exchange the values of tolerance and universal respect for ethical indifference and scepticism about essential values would be opening itself to immense risks and sooner or later would see the most fearful spectres of its past reappear in new forms."