



WHAT'S THE EU REFERENDUM GOT TO DO WITH CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING?



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INTRODUCTION

In June 2003 in a Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *“Ecclesia in Europa: On Jesus Christ alive in His Church: The Source of Hope for Europe”*, the Polish Pope, now St. John Paul II delivered an invitation to hope:

“Europe, you stand at the beginning of the third millennium. “Open your doors to Christ! Be yourself. Rediscover your origins. Relive your roots”.

He was not offering a view on sovereignty, the single currency, or the European Central Bank, any assessment of VAT contributions and agricultural subsidies or the national costs of being in or out. Rather it was a spiritual reminder:

“Down the centuries you have received the treasure of the Christian faith. It has grounded your life as a society on principles drawn from the Gospel and traces of this are evident in the art, literature, thought and culture of your nations. But this heritage does not belong just to the past; it is a project in the making to be passed to future generations, for it has indelibly marked the life of the individuals and peoples who together have forged the continent of Europe”. ...It is the invitation to everyone, believers and non-believers alike, to blaze new trails leading to a ‘Europe of the spirit’ in order to make the continent a true ‘common home’ filled with the joy of life”

How far is Pope John Paul II’s positive vision from the depressingly reductionist referendum debate we have been witnessing in the media? No mention of cultural roots, art, languages, literature, histories, philosophies or theologies. ‘Project Fear’ and ‘Project Brexit’ seem to have eclipsed all hope.

As John Paul II stressed in *Ecclesia in Europa*, our continent has

“a growing need for hope, a hope that will enable us to give meaning to life and history and to continue on our way together.”

This therefore is an attempt to look at roots, not least roots from Catholic Social Teaching, to rekindle an ethical vision of Europe, and whilst arguing that we should commit ourselves to Europe as an ongoing journey, and mindful of former President of Ireland Mary McAleese’s remark that “The Europe we want to see is at an early stage of development” – it is a recommendation at least to read and reflect on Pope John Paul II’s *Ecclesia in Europa* before you cast your vote in the EU referendum.



COMPLEXITY NOT 'SIMPLISTICISM'

Referenda tend to be treated as political quick fixes – usually ill-thought out, badly prepared for and inevitably binary and crudely polarising. The words of an eminent physicist fit the challenge: “The more complex we discover life to be, we tend to replace complexity with fantasy simplicity”. As one tabloid commentator put it “The line-up is clear: Hitler for remain, Isis for leave.”

The reality is that the European Union is a unique and complex construct – neither a federation nor a purely intergovernmental organisation. The functions of the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, proposals, vetoes and qualified majority votes and administrative support are barely reported and scarcely understood. A recent study put the UK at the bottom of the league of knowledge and awareness of the European Union – with only Latvian ignorance below us. For example, the canard is regularly wheeled out that we are dominated by a vast Brussels European bureaucracy. Yet the number of civil servants in the European Commission is 33,000, 6,000 the European Parliament and at the Council of Ministers 3,500. This gives a total of 42,500. This total is about one tenth the size of the UK civil service in 2015 (439,000). The whole EU employs fewer people than many UK Government departments (e.g. DWP – 81,200). Moreover, as qualified individuals coming together from all the nations of Europe (including the UK), they are committed to making the international experiment that is the EU work.

The theologian Fr.Patrick Riordan SJ is positively respectful of the EU's institutions in his paper *Europe's Common Good: The Contribution of the Catholic Church*. Drawing on the Vatican II decree's *Gaudium et Spes* (S74) definition of the Common Good as embracing “the sum of those conditions of social life by which individuals, families and groups can achieve their own fulfilment in a relatively thorough and ready way”, Fr.Riordan boldly states “*the institutions of the EU belong among the conditions which are constructed to enable individuals and communities to achieve their fulfilment*”.

There is not time here to offer a breakdown of EU institutions, save to recommend Chris Bickerton of Cambridge's excellent “*The European Union: A Citizen's Guide*” in which, interestingly, he argues that the real problem is not the European Union and its complex institutions but rather the failure of relationships between nation states and their voters that is at the root of the current disquiet. Professor John Mc.Cormick in “*Why Europe Matters for Britain*” argues that closer union has made Europe more prosperous and rejects the idea that the EU is undemocratic. There is plenty of democracy, he insists, it is our fault for not voting. As turnout in elections for European Members of Parliament is less than 40% it is tempting to add that they deserve much more media analysis and attention. Nor are independent objective ‘facts’ easy to pin down. According to David Charter in *Europe In or Out*, in 2000 the Institute of Directors concluded that “*the costs of EU membership outweigh the benefits significantly – a net annual cost of 1.75% of GDP*”. That same year he notes the National Institute for Economic and Social Research came to the opposite conclusion that



the Gross Domestic Product would fall by 1.75% if we moved outside the EU. Looking back at that first referendum on the European Community, it is remarkable that the two opposing statements “Why you should vote yes’ and ‘Why you should vote no’, published by the Britain in Europe and the National Referendum Campaign respectively, centre on the same arguments of jobs, food prices, trading deficits and our traditions – as does today’s referendum. Together with our European partners we have over forty years built a complex tapestry of institutions and relationships. We have drafted and participated in updating Treaties, expanding the Union to include new members such as Portugal, Spain and Greece as they moved back from dictatorship to democracy and the Iron Curtain came down. We have participated – and chaired in our turn – Councils of Ministers and, in drawing up thousands of EU-wide regulations and trading ties within and without Europe. The European Union has been forged by treaties, covenants and consensus building. Far from being an overimposing superstate the EU’s main practical function has been to enforce the multiple regulations against non-tariff barriers that ensure it is a genuine single market – the objective driven forwards by Mrs.Thatcher in the 1980’s.

Again, Fr.Riordan SJ stresses that *“the grand expansion of the EU is a project of constructing not only a set of institutions but also more intangibly a consciousness of solidarity, transcending national, cultural and linguistic divisions”*. He adds *“the process of the expansion of the EU proceeds by bargaining and negotiation but this does not rule out the possibility that there are real values guarding the process”*. He stresses that the EU is not only a common market created as a space for capital to function without hindrance in pursuit of private profit, nor is it simply a new global power block. The EU, he writes, it *“always more than the merely economic or merely a global power block”*.

FROM MARKET TO UNION

The titular language shift from “Common Market” through “European Community” to European Union is suggestive of this “always more than”.

The European Union is a group of democratic countries attempting to work together alongside each other. The former Commissioner, Chris Patten, described the European Union as a “stable and democratic neighbourhood with support for the international rule of law, and the institutions that seek to monitor it and the pursuit of external values in external policy”. Mary Mc.Aleese asks us to remember that the foundations of post-war Europe came out of the debris of war: “A group of men and women consciously decided to try love and not hate.”

Winston Churchill (whose voting intentions are today claimed by both sides) asserted in 1946 (according to Felix Klos) that “an act of faith was needed to save Europe from infinite misery and indeed from final doom”. He called for the creation of a “kind of United States of Europe” that “would rescue the continent from further chaos.” Churchill’s vision in 1946 was perhaps as starry-eyed as some of the current claims of Brexiteers. Churchill goes on “If



Europe were once united... there would be no limit to the happiness, to the prosperity and glory which 400 million people would enjoy”.

In 1949 a Council for Europe (not to be confused with the European Union) as established as the first Pan-European organisation.

Then, in May 1950 the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schumann, proposed a community to integrate the two key industries crucial to making weapons of war – namely coal and steel. On the basis of Schumann’s proposal, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and West Germany signed the Treaty of Paris creating the European Coal and Steel Community. This, in turn, led to the ‘High Authority’ which later became the European Commission and ‘The Common Assembly’ which became the European Parliament of directly elected members to balance the Council of Ministers, coming together from member countries. Schumann had spelt out

“Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity”.

Notably, ‘solidarity’ was one of the basic principles of the Schumann Declaration – a key pillar concept of Catholic Social Teaching along with Subsidiarity. Though there was talk of creating European Defence community, the focus remained on economic unity, leading to the Treaty of Rome signed in 1957 (which established the European Economic Community – EEC). The main intention remained to “make war unthinkable and materially impossible and to reinforce democracy” as the Schumann Declaration of 1950 spelt out.

After a period of French opposition under De Gaulle, Denmark, Ireland and the UK joined the EEC on 1st January 1973 and European Unity was re-defined as overcoming ancient enmities and bringing about a diversity of cultures...with common values and principles. In 1979 the European Parliament held its first direct elections by universal suffrage. 410 members were elected. The 1993 Copenhagen criteria for admission to the EU prescribed that all member states must observe the rule of law, human rights and respect minorities. Also in 1993, under the Maastricht Treaty hundreds of millions become “citizens of the Union” – which now had its own ‘home’ and ‘foreign affairs’ department (amended by the treaties of Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2001) and Lisbon (2007). In her Bruges speech of 1988 Mrs. Thatcher insisted that Warsaw, Prague and Budapest were as much European cities as London, Paris and Berlin.

In 2004 25 member states participated in the largest ever transnational elections in the world, reaffirming Article 1 of the EU Treaty on “ever closer union among the peoples’ of Europe”. Founded on numerous treaties, the European Union expanded from 6 to 28 member states. In 2012 the European Union received the Nobel Prize for Peace for having “contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe”. The Nobel Committee stated



“That dreadful suffering in World War II demonstrated the need for a new Europe – today war between Germany and France is unthinkable. This shows how, through well-aimed efforts and by building up mutual confidence, historical enemies can become close partners”.

The European Union in 1986 had adopted as its anthem the ‘Ode to Joy’ from Beethoven’s 9th Symphony, including the words “all men will be brothers”. Some have been over-eager to point out that the founding fathers, Robert Schumann, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean Monnet, the first European Commissioner, Konrad Adenaur, the German Chancellor and the Italian Prime Minister, Acide de Gasperi were all Catholics. Perhaps more significantly, they were all involved in the Young Catholic Workers movement developing the practical building blocks “See, Judge, Act” of twentieth century Catholic Social Teaching. For the record, in recent times the Commissioners Romano Prodi, Jacques Delor and the current Jose Manuel Barosa are also Catholics as were some of the heads of state (Dutch PM Rudd Lubbers, German Chancellor Kohl and Philip Gonzales of Spain, to name but a few). It has to be noted that Herman van Rompey for his sins was trained at a Jesuit school in Brussels and studied at the Catholic University of Louvain. Their presence has been enough to ignite a simmering conspiracy theory that the European Union and its intensification are a Papist plot. Notably, President Erdogan of Turkey refers to the EU as “Christian club”.

CHRISTIAN ROOTS

More seriously, there is little doubting the influence of Catholic Social Teaching (stretching back through centuries of theology and practice, and spelt out in the last century and since in Papal Encyclicals from *Rerum Novarum* to *Laudato Si*). From the focus on ‘workers’ rights’ in *Rerum Novarum* and Pope John Paul II’s *Laborens Exercens* to the need for us tackle climate change and ‘care for the earth’ drawn out in *Laudato Si*, based on the fundamental dignity of the human person, and person in community, the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching has stressed the twin pillars of **Solidarity** and **Subsidiarity**.

Solidarity As Pope Benedict spelt out, “Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone” (*Caritas in Veritate* para 38). Bishop Casaldaliga describes Solidarity as “the tenderness of peoples”.

Subsidiarity explicitly referred to in the Maastricht Treaty, is defined as the need to ensure that decisions and responsibilities are rooted as locally as possible – rather than accumulated at the centre and issued top-down. In other words, Government should only perform those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at local level. Despite efforts at regional devolution the UK remains the most centralised country in Europe.

These twin pillars support the overarching central concept of “*The Common Good*” – the antidote to the current western cultural focus on the consuming individual, now so dear to



liberal democracy. The German theologian Pope Benedict refreshed the tradition most recently in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, addressing the specific emerging social, economic and political challenges of the twenty first century. Published in 2009, it provides a supplement to *Ecclesia in Europa*, updating *Populorum Progressio* (Pope Paul VI's seminal encyclical on International Development as 'integral human development').

Ecclesia in Europa opens with recognition of a 'dimming of hope' in Europe (para7):

"The age we are living in, with its own particular challenges, can seem to be a time of bewilderment. Many men and women seems disoriented, uncertain, without hope, and not a few Christians share these feelings. There are many troubling signs which at the beginning of the third millennium are clouding the horizon of the European continent, which despite great signs of faith and witness and an atmosphere undoubtedly more free and unified, feels all the weariness, which historical events – recent and past have brought about deep within the hearts of its peoples, often causing disappointment."

Pope John Paul II is quite specific:

"[The] loss of Christian memory is accompanied by a kind of fear of the future. Tomorrow is often presented as something bleak and uncertain. The future is viewed more with dread than with desire...we find ourselves before a widespread existential fragmentation...Europe presently is witnessing the grave phenomenon of family crises and the weakening of the very concept of family, the continuation or resurfacing of ethnic conflicts, the emergence of racism, interreligious tensions, a selfishness that closes individuals and groups in on themselves, a growing overall lack of concern for ethics and an obsessive concern for personal interests and privileges. To many observers the current process of globalisation, rather than leading to the greater unity of the human race, risks being dominated by an approach that would marginalise the less powerful and increase the numbers of poor in the world....we see an increased weakness of interpersonal solidarity " (para 8)

Despite the fact that the present generation of Europeans have had peace and continental mobility for 60 years there is a pervasive sense of insecurity among European citizens. Significantly, globalisation both re-awakens a need to re-assert belonging and at the same time creates the need for nations to compete. As the European sociologist Ulrich Beck puts it:

"national provincialism is proliferating in the global crisis, jeopardising the European project of transforming enemies to neighbours."

It is not just widespread confusion over the structures of EU governance, larger questions of the role of the state in the context of increasing globalisation, and the capacity for



democratic engagement in an age of dominant neo-liberal economics underpin the malaise. As the economics of market fundamentalism exacerbates poverty and inequality and “market citizens” displace democratic politics and “citizens with social rights” are defined in terms of purchasing power without regard to wider socio-political responsibilities to fellow citizens or sense of reality of his or her dependence on others, it is not surprising that many think they are being left behind by globalisation and taken for granted by politicians, financial institutions and big business.

Placing the market above the state and democratic institutions at the centre of policy-making is challenged by Pope Benedict in *Caritas in Veritate*. He insists that without internal forms of solidarity and mutual trust the market cannot fulfil its proper economic function (Para 35). Pope Benedict adds:

“Lowering the level of protection accorded to the rights of workers or mechanisms of wealth distribution in order to increase the country’s international competitiveness hinder the achievement of lasting development. Moreover, the human consequences of current tendencies towards a short term economy, sometimes very short term, need to be carefully evaluated. This requires further and deeper reflection on the meaning of the economy and its goals as well as a profound and far-sighted revision of the current model of development” (Caritas in Veritate para 32)

A market society driven by maximising profit by reducing regulation has become a dominant ideology in many of the member states coupled with an emerging nationalism. Though, as the recent papers by IMF researchers and the OECD suggest, the orthodox neo-liberal paradigm has now reached its limits with calls for rich and strong countries to provide financial help (re-distributing wealth) to poor and weak countries.

An endemic political myth remains that if only power was handed back to nations states then all would be well, a popular view, succinctly expressed by Carole Malone (Sunday Mirror 29.05.2016) : “At least outside the EU we’d be masters of our own destiny. We could govern ourselves and decide what our country needs – not what a bunch of unelected bureaucrats in Brussels says it needs”.

In reality, the European Union today faces deepening economic and political challenges. Unemployment remains a scourge – with nearly 25% of the EU’s under 25’s out of work – notably in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy. Immigration and free movement of labour is proving problematic not least in the context of conflict crises in Syria, the Middle East and Africa.

Issues of migration, border controls, trade and employment and incomes merge into questions of governance and costs and ‘democratic deficits’. Increasingly, the referendum



debate is being framed as classic Tory 'free marketeers' versus 'anti-immigrant Brexiteers' – both of whom have displaced the original European Union ideals with market economics.

Pope John Paul II reminds us that the Church's concern for Europe is born of her very nature and mission: "From the biblical conception of man [for which read 'person'] Europe drew the best of its humanistic culture, found inspiration for its artistic and intellectual creations, created systems of law, and not least, advanced the dignity of the person as a subject of inalienable rights" (*Ecclesia in Europa* Para 25). In other words, the Church is keen to help Europe to build herself by revitalising her original Christian roots. Nor are they to be regarded as exclusive. Para 19 of *Ecclesia in Europa* reads:

"Many are the spiritual roots [of the structures] underlying the recognition of the value of the human person and his inalienable dignity, the sacredness of human life and the centrality of the family, the importance of education and freedom of thought, speech and religion, the legal protection of individuals and groups, the promotion of solidarity and the Common Good and the recognition of the dignity of labour. These roots have helped lead to the submission of political power to the rule of law and to respect for the rights of individuals and peoples. Here we should mention the spirit of ancient Greece and Rome, the contributions of the Celtic, Germanic, slave and Finno-Ugric peoples and the influence of Jewish and Islamic culture".

Ecclesia in Europa is not a generalist abstract evasion of the particular issues. We are reminded that Christians are "called to have a faith capable of critically confronting contemporary culture and resisting its enticements; of having a real effect on the world of culture, finance, society and politics". There are specific references, for example, of the need to confront the challenge of unemployment which "in many nations of Europe represents a grave blight on society " (para 87). Moreover, "The church is called to remember that labour constitutes a good for which society as a whole must feel responsible". Furthermore, it continues " to this can be added the problems connected with the increase in migration".

"The challenges presently facing out service of the Gospel of Hope include the growing phenomenon of immigration, which calls on the Church's ability to welcome each person regardless of the people or nations to which he or she belongs. This phenomenon is also prompting European society and its institutions as a whole to seek a just order and forms of co-existence capable of respecting everyone, as well as the demands of legality, with a feasible process of integration "(para 100)

Pope John Paul II acknowledges that "the phenomenon of migration challenges Europe's ability to provide for forms of intelligent acceptance and hospitality". He points out that "a universal vision of the Common Good demands this, we need to broaden our gaze to



embrace the needs of the entire human family. The phenomenon of globalisation itself calls for openness and sharing if it is not to be a source of exclusion and marginalisation but rather a basis for solidarity of all in the production and exchange of goods.” (para 107). This includes welcoming refugees (Para 109). Coupled with this is the reminder that “the whole church is called to give new hope to the poor....preferential love for the poor is a necessary dimension of Christian existence and service to the Gospel” (para 86). Nor can the proper use of the goods of the earth and care of the environment be discounted (para 89). The debates on the effects of migration and environmental regulation will continue doubtless against a background of ill-informed panic (e.g. the scurrilous notion of all of Turkey’s population of 78 million migrating to the UK). More fundamental is *Ecclesia in Europa*’s insistence on the need for dialogue “aimed at building a Europe seen as a community of peoples and individuals, a community joined together.”

EUROPE IS OPENNESS

Ecclesia in Europa addresses the challenges facing Europe from globalisation through a commitment to dialogue. Moreover, Europe is already a hopeful experience of unity, “it is a unity which rooted in a common Christian inspiration, is capable of reconciling diverse cultural traditions and which demands at the level of both society and Church, a constant growth in mutual knowledge open to increased sharing of individual values” (para 4). Fr.Patrick Riordan remarks “It remains an issue for humankind to understand what was going on in economic, social. Cultural and political processes shaping our world...European history shows us that we are very much still at the beginning stage in the understanding of many dimensions of human social order and what can be done.”

Can the European Union, then, become a continent-wide expression of what it is to be human together in the twenty first century. As *Ecclesia in Europa* puts it

“even though it has developed into a highly diversified reality, it need to build a new model of unity in diversity, as a community of reconciled nations open to the other continents and engaged in the present process of globalisation” (para 109)...It should take place in a way that puts into an ever more fully developed manner the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. In the process of the continent’s integration it is of capital importance to remember that the union will lack substance if it is reduced to its merely geographic and economic dimensions: rather it must consist above all in an agreement about the values which must find expression in its law and in its life.” (Para 189)

The UK has an historical tradition of being outward looking, sea-faring, engaged with the wider world, a Britain of traders, missionaries and explorers reaching out to an interconnected, independent world. *Ecclesia in Europa* states boldly “Saying



'Europe' must be the equivalent of saying 'Openness' (para 111)... Europe cannot close in on itself. It cannot and must not lose interest in the rest of the world. On the contrary it must remain faithfully aware of the fact that other countries, other continents, await its bold initiatives, in order to offer to poorer peoples the means for their growth and social organisation and to build a more just and fraternal world...It must express a concrete and tangible commitment to solidarity which makes the poor the agents of their own development. To achieve this Europe must become an active partner in promoting a globalisation in solidarity... accompanied by values of equity, justice and freedom....based on the firm conviction that the marketplace needs to be "appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the state so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied" (Para 112).

Notably, in the top five original aims of the Common Market spelt out in the UK recommendation to join in 1976 were "to bring together the peoples of Europe, to raise living standards and improve working conditions, to promote growth and boost world trade to help maintain peace and freedom and to help the poorer regions of Europe and the rest of the world." Indeed the early years of the European Community (under commissioner Claude Cheysson) had an exemplary record through its programme for international aid and development.

In May 2015 the Europa University in Florence highlighted the need for a new narrative capable of transforming Europe and re-engaging citizens. It's practical proposals included introducing a minimum social protection (and an intervention fund to guarantee it) to redress the disparities produced by the EU's monetary and fiscal policies. It suggested shifting priorities from agriculture to a common urban policy for renewed growth and employment linked to addressing climate change; city mayors and local government should be given a more prominent role, an energy union established to guarantee security and a more prominent role for Europe's role in and openness to the world.

But the European Union also needs to develop its democracy, to become more transparent, strengthen the European Parliament (with powers to propose legislation and a second chamber – an Assembly of Citizens?), moving towards a Europe for the people by the people addressing the challenges of the twenty first century. Its structures are not innate or inevitable – they can be recreated.

Finally a word on "sovereignty". Ulrich Beck, in a Guardian opinion piece, wrote "If the Great Depression of the 1930's taught us anything it was that a retreat into the national idyll is fatal because it turns the threatened catastrophe into a reality – the collapse of the global economy, and at a time when unemployment is increasing exponentially across the globe". He goes on to argue that "if the European Union did not exist we would have to invent it today. Far from being a threat to national sovereignty, at the beginning of the twenty first



century, the European Union makes it possible. In the world today, society is faced with the menacing aggregation of global problems that resist national solutions. Nation states left to their own devices are powerless incapable of exercising sovereignty. The pooled sovereignty of the European Union provides the only hope for every nation and every citizen to live in freedom and peace....If the members renounce their European responsibility and solidarity in a frenzy of national reflexes, everyone loses. Each nation on its own is condemned to global insignificance. Those who want to regain sovereignty in our corner of the world 'risk society' must will Europe, think Europe and work towards its realisation."

A final word from the Synod of Bishops who composed *Ecclesia in Europa*

"Europe today must not simply appeal to its former Christian heritage: it needs to be able to decide about its future in conformity with the person and message of Jesus Christ" (para 2)

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