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How does the Church deal with Brexit, its reasons and its consequences?
Wie geht die Kirche mit dem Brexit, seinen Gründen und seinen Folgen um?

The Church in the UK in general and the Church of England in particular

When we speak of the Church in the UK we must, of course, speak of many churches. The UK is a multi-religious society and a multi-church society. There are close relationships between the churches but we do not have a co-ordinated way of speaking with one voice. The UK is also an increasingly secular nation. Churches have to earn the right to speak in the public square. However, although the Christian Faith does not have the place in society that it once had, it is still a significant presence and force in British society.

At the same time, the Church of England is – in England – 'by law established'. In England, it has a special place in the constitution and life of land. That role gives it a unique place in the whole of UK society. Some of its bishops – myself included – sit in the House of Lords in the UK Parliament, and the Archbishop of Canterbury is generally considered to be the leading Christian – and religious – figure in the whole country. The Church of England is acutely conscious of its particular responsibility to serve all the people of the nation, especially England.

In general, I would say that the leadership of all the churches is heavily pro-European and was strongly in favour of the remaining in the EU. This was certainly the case for the Church of England.[1] However, it is a convention in the UK that churches do not tell their people how to vote in elections. The same reticence was instinctively applied to the Referendum. Before the Referendum, Bishops, myself among them, spoke very much in favour of remaining in the EU in the House of Lords but, during the Referendum itself, the Church of England (and I confess that I had some hand in this) chose to maintain a public neutrality. Instead, following the example of the Church of Scotland during the Independence Referendum in 2014, we aimed to create spaces – physical and on line[2] – in which people could debate the issues in an intelligent, informed and respectful way.

Behind this outward respect for the democratic process and its hesitancy to use its influence improperly, the Church of England – and I think this applies to other churches – was aware that, although its leadership was heavily in favour of remaining, the people of the land and, therefore, those who look to the Church of England to represent them in some way, were very divided.[3] I think it would be true to say that we did not want to alienate ourselves from a large proportion of the very people we were trying to serve. We wanted to maintain our

[1] The story of Coventry Cathedral's commitment to Europe is particularly interesting. Some of it can be read in my 2014 lecture in Dresden's Frauenkirche, Available at: See [http://www.dioceseofcoventry.org/images/document_library/UDR00588.pdf].
[2] See [http://www.reimaginingeurope.co.uk/].
[3] One post-Referendum survey indicated that 56% of Christians voted to leave the EU.

credibility to help with the healing and reconciliation process that would inevitably be needed after the vote, whichever way it went.[4]

Nevertheless, as the campaign progressed and, as it became clear that – much to everyone's surprise – the Leavers were becoming increasingly stronger, the Church defected from its public neutrality and more and more voices spoke out in favour of remaining, including the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Though it should be noted, that some – a minority but significant nonetheless – Church voices spoke out in favour of leaving. One example is Canon Giles Fraser, whose regular column in the left-leaning *Guardian* national newspaper was influential. It is worth noting that Giles Fraser was one example among several of the nation's intelligentsia which was by no means entirely on the remain side.[5] There is a long standing progressive, left-wing ambivalence to the EU on the grounds of it being a 'rich man's club'. (Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Opposition, was historically of that position, and many think that 'in his heart' he still is).

On the fateful morning of the 24th June 2016 when the result became clear, most bishops and, I imagine, many local clergy set about the immediate task of 'shock management': helping those who were bitterly disappointed, especially those who felt vulnerable for all sorts of reasons, encouraging some sort of mutual understanding and respect between people, some of them in the same families, on different sides, and addressing the small but very ugly and worrying outbreaks of racist crime, verbal and physical.

I would say that we also set about another task: examination. We had to face the fact that the leadership of the church was out of touch with many of its committed adherents and with many others across the nation want to serve and reach for the gospel. Why had 51.9 per cent of the population voted to leave the EU, many of them against their financial interest? Why had we not understood them better? How had the Church, the political establishment, the European project, the world economy, failed them? That leads me to the next section of this paper.

Causes: disaffection, disillusionment and disconnection

I have found David Goodhart's work on the differences between 'Somewheres' and 'Anywheres' a helpful analysis in the process of examination.[6] I will describe his reasoning more fully shortly. First, though, let me very briefly acknowledge that even among a large proportion of remainers, there was not an unqualified, overwhelming enthusiasm for the EU. In a lecture I gave in Dresden's Frauenkirche in 2014 on 'Coventry and Europe: lessons

[4] On reflection, I think it was a mistake for the Church not to have been more assertive about the European peace project. The campaign was ranged about facts and figures, most related to economics and prosperity, and many of them disputable. There was a role for the Church in keeping to the higher ground of ethics and peace.

[5] Fraser, 'The Levellers and the Diggers were the Original Eurosceptics', February 2016, Available at: [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2016/feb/11/the-levellers-and-the-diggers-were-the-original-eurosceptics].

[6] See David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The populist revolt and the future of politics* (2017).

for the UK from the past and perspectives for its future relationship with Europe', I spoke of 'a general British malaise over Europe with 'many and complex reasons: historical, geographical and psychological'.[7]

Within that general malaise about Europe there was a particular and widespread frustration with the European Project. There was a concern that it was proving to be more interested in being one political community than 'a community of communities' as originally conceived. There was irritation that it had become too bureauracratic and expensive, possibly even a little corrupt. There was a sense that it had lost its soul and become more focused on power and money than on peace and service to the world. There was an anxiety that a worrying democratic deficit had developed, with those making the decisions being unaccountable politically. There was a deeper anxiety that sovereignty had been ceded, and that control had been lost over law and borders (and, amongst some, international trade). There was also the fear, that in some ways was previously unspoken, of immigration and a loss of identity.

Many of these concerns were unfair. Nevertheless, they were in the air that everyone was breathing – remainers, brexiters and the not sures. And it was an air that the social dynamic in the United Kingdom that has developed in the United Kingdom since the 1960s, had made very stale for some.

The aftermath and reaction towards the Referendum's result revealed something about the state and division in British society today. The shock and anger that remainers expressed in the weeks following the vote displayed how inaccessible the world-views and decision-making process of brexiters were for them. Some analysts, David Goodhart among them, pointed out that this loss of "the Britain they knew", which remainers so vividly felt, is comparable to what brexiters claim they have experienced daily in British society.[8] Goodhart's analysis rings true: the shock at the result stems from a previously misunderstood chasm between two opposing, quasi-ideological groups he classifies as the Anywheres and Somewheres. Understanding this divide could help bridge it again.

Traditionally, ideologically and politically opposed groups have been classified as left or right-wing. However, the fact that people of both political persuasions can be found in both and opposing camps of the Referendum, and they seemingly have such difficulty understanding each other, indicates that the divide is not simply a political one. Further, research following the Referendum revealed that factors such as age, income, and education prove a far more reliable predictor of someone's vote in the referendum. In short, Goodhart suggests that it is identity formation, which consequently shapes an individual's world-view, that is dividing the British (and perhaps European) public.

A typical example of an Anywhere could be found in Britain's large, multicultural urban areas, such as London or Birmingham. They are often young, university educated, and geographically mobile. Anywheres are named as such because their identity is achieved

[7] See [http://www.dioceseofcoventry.org/images/document_library/UDR00588.pdf].
[8] I am grateful to my research assistant, Evan Rieder, not only for his help in conceiving this paper but also for his drafting of the following summary of Goodhart's work.

rather than prescribed. Mostly, they have grown up in a Europe where the importance of borders has been declining. Their academic accomplishments can be ascribed to their own efforts, allowing them the choice and mobility of where to study, settle, and work. Whilst studying, they would follow the traditional residential model at British universities – a hub of Anywheres among students and academic staff – living alongside and mixing with other European students from similar backgrounds. Generally, their experiences are based on achieved career and academic success, allowing them to be comfortable with novelty and encountering others. In short, the Anywhere's life revolves around accommodating to the change they face, and they have received the resources to do so. This allows the most extreme end of the Anywhere – the "global villager" – to wish for something like a world without borders.

This ideal collides spectacularly with a group whose identity relies far more around a sense of place. Goodhart labels these the Somewheres, whose identity is far more ascribed than achieved. The enjoyments and benefits of globalisation are less accessible to them than the Anywheres, since they often lack the social and geographical mobility higher education can offer. While Somewheres are underrepresented in the political elite and in the media, they actually form the majority of British society, often living less than twenty miles away from where they grew up. As a result, Somewheres gain a sense of identity through relatively permanent community by belonging to social groups, locally and nationally. However, the most pertinent developments in British society over the last thirty years have seen the decline of those institutions in which Somewheres found their social capital, often revolving around concepts like "faith, flag, and family". Their underrepresentation in the media and political elite has left their concerns (e.g. transport links, housing, and vocational provisions) lagging behind those of the Anywheres (e.g. migration and gender roles). The most extreme version of the Somewhere – the indecent populist – is therefore left with no choice but to cling to those things which lend them identity, often found in their familial role or Britishness.

Precisely because hugely differing life experiences informed both sides' identities and consequent world view, the logic of the opposing sides remain almost inaccessible to one another. The result is the mutual caricaturing of the other as the 'lefty, liberal-elite', or the 'racist little-Englander'. Goodhart's analysis persists that this divide is not just one of upper and lower-class or progressive and conservative politics – since both sides are liberal in the sense that they desire social autonomy and equality – but a struggle between a conception of identities that mutually threaten one another's cornerstones. If Goodhart's analysis is correct, the challenge that British society faces is immense, as it must learn to reconcile a ruling Anywhere class which insists that globalisation is inevitable, and a majority Somewhere class which is robbed of its identity by the developments its opposites actively pursue.

Consequences

So, over a year on since the Referendum and the other side of an General Election (which also proved to be unpredictable), what is the Church doing?

Well, as I tried to explain at the beginning of this paper, it is difficult to describe the actions of the Church as a whole, but let me give a few impressions that I am fairly confident about in relation to the Church of England.

We are ***respecting*** the result, even if we profoundly disagree with the outcome, and helping everyone to come to terms with it.

As I have been trying to say, we are also seeking to ***listen*** to the views of those who voted against especially the Somewhere's, and trying to find ways to reconnect with those from whom the Church is estranged, and has been for decades.

We are ***reconciling*** wherever we are able. The Referendum has exposed some very deep divides in our nation, some of which can be mapped generationally, culturally, geographically. The Church's business is reconciliation. We know that human beings often need to live with 'two truths' or, perhaps rather that we often found ourselves held within dialectic in which there is truth on both sides. 'Learning to disagree well' is a particular commitment of the present Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Church of England has a good record of holding people together who have profoundly different theological commitments. We have something to share with the nation and the polarization of views that so easily happens in political debate. To that end, the Archbishop of Canterbury has called for a Cross Party Commission in which political actors across the spectrum seek to find a common mind. Whether the Government heeds his advice or not, it is true to say that after the 2017 General Election there has been a significant change in tone on the part of the Prime Minister and Government, together with signs of a more consensual approach.

We are ***calling*** for a ***consideration of British identity***, encouraging people and institutions, the Government included, to use Brexit as an opportunity – welcome or unwelcome – to renew our self-understanding in ways that are truly good and, we would say, deeply Christian. At the same time, we are very watchful that a quite proper attention to British identity, including its Christian roots, does not lead to an improper appropriation of the Christian story and symbols for an ungodly nationalist narrative. We are mindful that some far-right groups march under the sign of the cross.

To all of this I would add that the Church is seeking to be a wise, very British voice that encourages a fundamentally ***pragmatic*** approach. Even if people think that Brexit is 'the best thing since sliced bread', how do we avoid it damaging the economy and undermining our relationships with our neighbours? Even if we think that Brexit is 'the worst thing since the Ice Age', how do we mitigate its risks and get to the result that does the least damage to our national life and the international order?

You will be interested to know that the Bishop of Leeds, Nick Baines, well known to the EKD as Co-Chair of Meissen, will be leading the political engagement of the Church of England with Brexit legislation in the House of Lords. I know that he has developed a good relationship with the Department for Exiting the EU, and that he will be wise and forceful voice in the ensuing debates.

Underlying the Church's pragmatism, though, will be some underlying theological convictions that will shape its contribution and, pray God, the future of the nation. Among these will be that identity is formed through relationships. Britain is, as the Brexiters like to say, 'renegotiating its relationship with the world'. How is this relationship to be constructed in a way that brings good to others, in a way that increases the 'net good' in the UK, Europe and the world? A particular test of this on home soil will be the moral imperative of generosity to and justice for EU citizens already resident in the UK. Holding the Government to account on this matter will be one of the priorities of the Church.

I am heading to Kiel to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of its reception of the Coventry Cross of Nails. In preparing for that event, I was moved by the words of the Lord Mayor of Coventry in a letter to the Oberbürgermeister of Kiel, in 1947.

> The sooner mankind recognises that we are members one of another, that if one suffers then all are affected, the better it will be for everyone. Wherever there is need, that of itself should be the call for others to endeavour to meet that need. We have difficulties and problems of construction, so have you.

Of course, it was majestic words like that on both sides of the English Channel that led to the creation of the European project in the first place, but they remain true as Britain leaves the Union. How does Britain, how do the remaining members of the Community find practical ways to show that it is in the national interest to be committed to legitimate national interests of others? How do we serve each other's needs and our 'problems of [re-] construction?

And talking of peace, let me end there. For peace was the original project – making war in Europe, as the Schuman Declaration put it, 'not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible'. Sustaining relationships that make for peace, and serve the purposes of peace in the world, relationships which are, therefore, just, generous, and based on trust, must remain as central to the really big European project to which I hope the UK will remain committed in the months and years that follow, just as they were to the months and years that followed the Second World War. Perhaps, then, even the soul of Europe will be renewed.