

Christianity as the Soul of Europe

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Note: This is the written text of an illustrated presentation

Introduction

Europe is constantly at the forefront of the news. There are many within Europe, including the UK, who feel deeply negatively towards what they see as an attempted super-state run by faceless bureaucrats - caricatured as a centralised set of institutions intent on banning lead in organ pipes and making us buy straight bananas. But for many who live outside Europe it appears to be a promised land. For thousands of refugees, Europe seems a paradise, a stronghold of peace, prosperity and civilisation. Those who have lived a long time in Europe seem weary of it. But those who aren't able to share the alleged European comforts, want to get here at any price to join us. 'What is that some have yet no longer want, and for which others yearn so deeply?'

What is Europe? Is it merely a certain geographical land mass and the diverse peoples who happen to live within it? Or is it also a certain project that aims to help those peoples to live together harmoniously and prosperously with a set of shared values? And if we want to be 'out' of Europe, is that a statement about our feeling disconnected from the continent or is it saying that we don't want to participate in certain shared political institutions? And how is Christianity mixed into our history, our identity, our soul?

This presentation explores some of the contradictions and challenges of Europe. It begins with a brief tour of the historical sources and origins of modern Europe and reviews the place of Christianity amongst those sources. We consider the triumphs and tragedies of twentieth-century Europe, which provide the immediate context for the modern European Union. And then we look at where Christianity - and particularly I suppose you will expect me to say something about the Anglican Diocese in Europe - stands within Europe today and how Christians might think about Europe as we live with the reality of a vote to 'leave' Europe. The presentation focuses to a degree on the East German city of Leipzig, because its built architecture conveniently highlights some of the key historical and Christian themes of our continent.

European origins and Christianity

Geographically, Europe is a pimple on the western edge of Asia, the second-smallest continent, occupying just 2% of the world's land surface. Yet, as a continent, it has punched well above its weight. It has had a unique influence on world history. Between the 16th and 20th centuries, European nations controlled at various times the Americas, most of Africa, Oceania, and the majority of Asia. Europe represents the only civilisation to have imposed itself on the rest of the world. It did this by conquest and settlement; by its

economic power; by the power of its ideas and because it had things everyone else wanted. Today every country on earth uses the discoveries of science, and science was a European invention.

Greece, Rome, Christianity, German warriors: Christendom

European civilisation can be understood as being formed out of the interaction of three initially distinct components (conveniently depicted in John Hirst's *Shortest History of Europe*):

The culture of Ancient Greece and Rome. The origins of our philosophy, maths, science, medicine and politics lie in Ancient Greece. These were transmitted to us through the military rule and law of the Roman Empire.

Christianity. From the life, death and resurrection of Jesus grew a religion which spread fast around the Greek-speaking Mediterranean.

German warriors living on the northern borders of the Empire eventually invaded and overran the Empire. Their descendants include modern-day Danes, Dutch, English, Flemish and Germans.

Christianity was in its origins radically separate from the Roman Empire. But in 313AD the Emperor Constantine became a Christian, and Christianity was made the official religion of Rome. 50 years later, all other religions were banned so Christianity was the only religion of the Empire. Rome became Christian. The church developed its own hierarchy of full-time paid officials – priests, bishops and archbishops - with one bishop, the bishop of Rome, as pope. The church developed its own system of canon law. And the church ran its own system of taxation. As Rome became Christian, so Christianity became Roman - the Roman Catholic Church.

During the fifth century, the Roman Empire found it increasingly difficult to resist the raids of German warriors from the north. In 476AD, Romulus, the last Western Roman Emperor, fell - a date which conventionally marks the end of the Western Roman Empire.

But though the Empire fell, Christianity did not. It preserved its hierarchy. And it preserved Greek and Roman learning. The German warriors did not destroy the church. And gradually the Germans themselves became Christian. Foremost amongst the missionaries to them was Boniface, the apostle to the Germans, who has been described as one of the outstanding creators of the first Europe. Boniface was sent by the pope from Devon first to Frisia and then to Germany. Boniface dared to chop down a sacred oak dedicated to the god Jupiter. When the god did not strike him down, the people were amazed and converted to Christianity. Boniface duly became the first Archbishop of all Germany East of the Rhine. So the German warriors became Christian.

From the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 until 1400, so for about 1000 years, what we call the Middle Ages, these three - Graeco-Roman civilisation, German warrior culture and Christianity - held together. They gave us: illustrated biblical manuscripts; the culture of knights and chivalry, the crusades; the monasteries – in a word the culture of 'Christendom'. It is this Christianised culture from which in succeeding centuries modern Europe grew, with which it struggled or from which it struggled to escape.

European history witnessed three major cultural and intellectual challenges to Christendom: the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment.

The Renaissance

What historians call 'modern times' can be taken as beginning around 1400. There is a consensus that the Renaissance began in Florence, and it is the Renaissance which stands as a central bridge between the middle ages and the modern period. The Renaissance is often described as the discovery or rediscovery of Greek and Roman learning. Perhaps what is more significant is that instead of Greek learning being used by the church to support its theology, now there were scholars operating outside the theological world imagining the Greek and Roman world as it had existed in its own time. They wanted to think themselves back into a world that was un- and pre-Christian. The Renaissance men were by no means anti-Christian. But they regarded the Greek and Roman period as 'the classical era' – the summit of human achievement. They wanted to celebrate all that human beings were capable of without any necessary reference to the Christian religion.

The Renaissance spread across Europe. We're going to be charting some further developments in European history with reference to the German city of Leipzig. The city hall is one of the most important buildings in Leipzig and one of the finest Renaissance buildings in Germany. Around the entire building and just under the roof runs an inscription which is one of the longest inscriptions on any building, dedicating the building to the praise of God.

The Reformation

The image of Luther looks down upon us from a stained glass window in St Thomas's church in Leipzig. The Renaissance left the Roman Catholic church intact, but the next great disruption to medieval Europe did not. Luther initiated the sixteenth-century Reformation. Luther articulated growing dissatisfaction with a church that had become rich, powerful and somewhat corrupt. Luther emphasised salvation by faith not works, and doctrine that was derived from scripture rather than tradition. Luther was excommunicated by the pope, but sympathy for his teaching rapidly spread through Germany, aided by the newly invented printing presses.

The Reformation sparked huge antagonism between Protestants and Catholics right across Europe. For over 100 years both sides fought each other, literally, in wars. Each regarded the other as totally wrong, not as a different sort of Christian but as anti-Christian. It was better that a Catholic or

Protestant be killed, than that they preach a doctrine offensive to God. Yet after fighting each other for 100 years, with neither side winning, a sort of truce arose and gradually a sense of toleration. Firstly, it was accepted that there could be Catholic countries and Protestant countries. And then it was gradually accepted that different sorts of Christians could live peacefully together in the same country.

Protestantism produced its own Christian culture. Few figures are more important in this culture than Johann Sebastian Bach. For 27 years he directed the choir at St Thomas Leipzig. And the boys' choir of the Thomaskirche is one of the oldest and most famous in Germany. As one of the greatest composers, Bach is sometimes known as the fifth evangelist, so powerful are his arrangements of the St Matthew and St John Passions.

Protestantism undid the synthesis of Christianity with Graeco-Roman culture. After Luther, the church was not merely the Roman Catholic church.

The Enlightenment

But it was the third big intellectual movement in European society, the Enlightenment, which did most to reduce the power of the church and to progress beyond the culture of Christendom. In France the major Enlightenment figures were Voltaire and Rousseau, in Germany Immanuel Kant, and in Scotland David Hume and Adam Smith.

The Enlightenment was marked by a desire to liberate human reason from the chains that would bind it. 'Dare to know' was Kant's motto. In France the chains were understood mainly as the power of the king and the superstition of religion. The Enlightenment was one of the most important intellectual forces behind the French Revolution.

The Enlightenment wasn't primarily a political or revolutionary movement. It was concerned with expanding the possibilities of human knowledge by clearing away superstition. Adam Smith set out a rational basis for economics. Biblical scholars began literary critique of the scriptures. Immanuel Kant set out a rational basis for ethics. All of this posed difficult questions for Christians as to how their faith should relate to reason – questions we are still grappling with today. The success of the Enlightenment is shown in the fact that today we are more likely to trust science and rationality than the pronouncements of bishops as sources of authority.

Romanticism

The strong emphasis on human reason produced a reaction, however, in the nineteenth-century Romantic movement. The German writer and statesman Goethe is often regarded as a bridge figure between the Enlightenment and the Romantic movement - his statue stands in a prominent place in Leipzig. In England, the Romantic movement is associated especially with the Lake District poets, Wordsworth and Coleridge. These poets emphasise feeling, emotion and passion. The Lake District poets wanted to put people back in

touch with nature. But Romanticism could also exalt patriotic feeling. Johann Fichte, a disciple of Kant, wrote:

Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds by nature herself, long before any human art begins; they understand each other and have the power of continuing to make themselves understood more and more clearly; they belong together and are by nature one and an inseparable whole.

It was this sense of people having natural linguistic and racial bonds that encouraged nation-states to discover and sense their identity in the nineteenth century.

The twentieth century: war

So, as we come into the twentieth century, Europe is a continent into which Christianity has been mixed from the beginning. For 1000 years after the fall of the Roman Empire the continent lived under Christendom. Yes, the Renaissance harked back to pre-Christian classical forms. To be sure, the Reformation had split Christianity from its associations with Roman order. And the Enlightenment had proposed a religion that was within the limits of reason alone. But in 1913 few would doubt that the Soul of Europe was Christian.

Much changed in the next few decades. Rising nationalism, military competition and a complex set of alliances led to the First World War. Some 70 million combatants were mobilised in the Great War. Nine million soldiers and a further seven million civilians died. For years afterwards people mourned the dead, the missing and the many disabled. For the first time, war memorials appeared on village greens across Britain listing all those who had died. The First World War raised very sharp questions about how it was that so-called Christian nations could hurt each other so deeply.

The First World War was said to be the 'war to end all wars', but just 20 years after it ended, Europe and the world were again plunged into war. The Second World War was a global war that involved the vast majority of the world's nations. It was the most widespread war in history and directly involved more than 100 million people from over 30 countries. In a state of 'total war' the major participants threw their entire economic, industrial and scientific capabilities behind the war, erasing the distinction between civilian and military resources. With an estimated 50 to 85 million fatalities, the Second World War was the deadliest conflict in human history.

And it had one particularly ghastly feature. Hitler's final solution to the Jewish problem involved a holocaust aimed at the extinction of the Jewish race. In Leipzig there is a memorial to the Bamberger family. They ran a popular sweet shop that they had built up into a thriving business over the generations. It was their life's work and it was destroyed in one night, *Kristallnacht*, the night of the broken glass.

Leipzig displays a poignant memorial to the Jewish synagogue. The synagogue was deliberately set on fire by the Nazis. The Jews were then made to pay to have it demolished. The Jewish population of the city before the war was over 11,000. Jews were steadily deported from 1942 onwards. By 1945 there were only 15 Jews remaining. The empty seats in the memorial have an obvious symbolism: the Jews of Leipzig are no more.

Rebuilding after the Second World War

Europe emerged from the Second World War in a state of ruin. Its economies were either shattered or deeply in debt. Much of its infrastructure was destroyed. Supposedly Christian nations had fought each other to death and dragged the rest of the world into their conflicts. And there was the emerging horror of what had been done to the Jews. For Christians in particular there was a massive question around what kind of Christian culture was now possible in Europe.

After the war, Europe faced a rebuilding task of gargantuan proportions. In this, peace building, the recreation of trust, economic prosperity and new institutional structures went hand in hand. The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952 was a landmark, giving Europe its first organisation with genuinely supranational characteristics. By setting German and French coal and steel production under a new independent 'High Authority' it was intended that the major powers could never again engage in warfare against each other. European cooperation began with peacemaking, reconciliation and forgiveness.

Three of the key players in postwar reconstruction were Robert Schuman (Foreign Secretary then Prime Minister of France), Konrad Adenauer (Chancellor of Germany) and Alcide de Gasperi (Prime Minister of Italy). Each of these men were Roman Catholics who put their faith into practice in Christian Democracy. Schuman was outspoken that reconstruction was possible only in a Europe 'deeply rooted in Christian values'. And Adenauer saw the creation of new European structures as a 'real Christian obligation'. Together with the (Catholic) French diplomat Jean Monnet, they were the early advocates and architects of European union.

The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community was followed by the Treaty of Rome (1957), which set up the European Economic Community (EEC), and the 'Common Market' was born. The EEC had six founder members: Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany. Its initial aim was to bring about economic integration, including a common market and customs union.

The Cold War

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Europe grew and prospered economically. But it lived in the shadow of the Cold War. After the Second World War an 'iron curtain' had descended upon Europe, separating East from West. The sudden ending of Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall dividing East and

West was something which felt like a miracle to those of us who lived through it. Reasons for the fall of the Wall were numerous, but the church certainly played a key role.

St Nicholas Church is the oldest and largest church in Leipzig. It is also the place where the peaceful revolution in 1980s Germany began. The courageous parish priest, Christian Fuehrer, opened up a weekly dialogue with prayers for peace each Monday evening. The dialogues and prayers attracted large crowds, so many that the church with its 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 9 October 1989 about 70,000 demonstrators came face to face with 8000 armed soldiers. Given the large number of demonstrators, the soldiers dared not shoot. Protests quickly spread throughout the whole of East Germany, leading to the opening of borders on 9 November and the fall of the communist regime. A member of the Stasi, commenting afterwards, said:

Our security was comprehensive. We had been prepared for every eventuality. But we were not prepared for prayers and for candles.

After 1989

After 1989, and the end of a bi-polar world, Europe opened new vistas of freedom and hope for millions of people. There was a sense of excitement about the future. The healing of wounds and division became the central story. 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 order. The European Union seemed to him the world's most powerful invention for advancing peace. 'Europe united, or re-united, 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 that Europe should just be a matter of economics. It is, he thought, not just about markets but about values and culture. Europe had to promote a new sense of belonging. And so, in 1990 Delors told the churches:

We need a heart and soul. The door is now open for whoever can offer a heart and soul.

Delors offered regular informal meetings between the churches and officials of the European Commission. These eventually led to a legal commitment on the part of the European Union to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with the churches and non-governmental organisations. This provision was built into the 2007 Lisbon treaty.

The years following 1989 witnessed both the widening and deepening of the European Community. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) provided for a single currency - the euro. Treaties in Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2001) paved the way for enlargement of the Community, and the 2007 Lisbon treaty gave the EU a European Council President and a High Representative for Foreign Affairs. But along the way the influence of the Christian roots weakened. In 2003, Giscard d'Estaing, the Chairman of the Convention on a new European Constitution, famously rejected reference in the preamble not only to God but also to the influence of Christianity on European history!

In 2014, Pope Francis addressed the Parliament of the European Union in Strasbourg. He expressed concern that Europe was no longer open to the transcendent dimension of life, and that it risks losing both its own soul and the humanistic spirit which it still loves and defends. The pope recalled the 2000 years of history which links Europe and Christianity. He acknowledged that this history was not free of conflicts, errors and sins. But he saw also in it a desire to work for the good of all, and a beauty which is reflected in the architecture of Europe's 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 of conflicts.

Challenges for the EU since 2015

In fact 2015 proved to be a year of grave challenges for the European Union.

Migration

The first challenge is migration. It is the crisis that confronts us, on our TV screens, in our newspapers, in our political discourse. Many British people seem to feel that the United Kingdom has been specially targeted by migrants. This is not so. Migration presents a problem across Europe, most acutely in the Mediterranean states. But we each see the problem that is on our own doorstep.

We have to confront the migration reality. The reality is that:

Birthrates across Europe have been in decline for many years, so there is now a decline in the numbers of young people of 'traditional regional origin'.

Europe is materially rich. The European Union has been a pole of attraction for over 50 years because of its economic prosperity and because its economic model has paid some attention to the distribution of the benefits of that prosperity.

But beyond our frontiers, where political, economic and ecological disaster are all too common, growing populations find little hope of a good future for their families in their homelands. We have failed to

export our successes to large swathes of the world. Nor can we deny at least a share of responsibility for their problems, with our colonial manipulation and our greed for their oil and other resources.

Migration will not just go away. The painful reality is that we have to find ways of living with it. But are we willing to find equitable means of sharing the burden of migration between different European cultures? And can Europe together manage migration so that we receive people safely and integrate people at a rate we can cope with?

Migration threatens the Schengen agreement and the free movement of peoples which has been one of the EU's great successes. This is all very much in balance.

Debt

The second challenge is debt. One of the things that strikes me, as someone who travels around Europe a great deal, is the huge gulf between levels of prosperity in the north and the south. Germany and Scandinavia run impressive economies. It is very different in Southern Italy and Spain where youth unemployment has been running at 40%. And the travails of Greece as it tries to negotiate its indebtedness have occupied much of the attention of the top leadership of the European Union. I know from the first-hand experience of our Anglican parish in Athens something of the economic hardship that has been experienced.

The problem of debt, and specifically Greek debt, threatens the common currency, the euro, which has been another huge achievement for the European Union.

Rising nationalism and populism

The third and biggest challenge is rising nationalism and populism. It is unsurprising that, in a world that is becoming increasingly global, populations turn inwards and look to assert local identity. Very often this is expressed as hostility towards the outside world, be this in the form of migrants or legislation imposed by 'Brussels'.

Populism tends to exist in left-wing forms in Southern Europe and right-wing forms in Northern Europe. Some of the most successful populist parties are Fidesz in Hungary, Syriza in Greece, the Law and Justice party in Poland and the National Front in France. Its power has been asserted in the Brexit referendum vote, with its rallying cry, 'we want our country back'.

So the third great challenge facing Europe is the political challenge of maintaining confidence in European political institutions in the face of growing populism and nationalism.

It is a difficult time for Europe. And we don't know how, even whether, it will survive.

The Diocese in Europe

The Christian map of Europe is dominated by the Catholic Church in the south, the Protestant Churches in the 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 in Antwerp and was eventually martyred near Brussels. Our church in Hamburg recently celebrated its 400th anniversary. And in Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy and Greece our Anglican churches have official state recognition, with state funding for the Anglican Church in the first two of those countries. Our diocese includes seven archdeacons and has much the biggest land area of the 42 Church of England dioceses.

Anglicans have particular gifts to offer Europe. We have a fine musical tradition. Fresh Expressions is of great interest to continental churches that are facing the loss of whole generations of young people. And the Alpha course is widely used on the continent. It is frequently and correctly said that there are now more Catholics than Anglicans using Alpha.

We have an important part to play in the ecumenical life of the continent. We have always had a strong involvement with CEC, and we are present in various ways in the ACT Alliance – which brings together Europe's biggest Christian development agencies.

The task of reconciliation is an essential part of the gospel message, and in Europe the task is never done. The original Anglican church in Leipzig was destroyed by the RAF in the Second World War. We now borrow another church building and have lively international congregations that worship in both English and German. In December I was invited to lead a 'nine lessons and carols' service at the Frauenkirche in Dresden, where we hold a monthly English-speaking service. The Frauenkirche was reduced to ruins in the appalling firestorms created by allied bombers in the Second World War. It has been beautifully rebuilt and restored by donations from both Germany and the UK and last year celebrated the tenth anniversary of its new incarnation.

The Anglican Church in Europe was once the preserve of ex-patriot British. Nowadays it is highly international and diverse. At a confirmation I conducted at the beginning of this 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 migrant young man from Pakistan. The clergy assisting me were from New Zealand and the Netherlands. Our congregation is the only English-speaking church in the southern Netherlands with a full-time pastor. The highest percentage of its congregation are Dutch, followed by Indian.

Churches across our diocese have been actively involved in the refugee crisis, most significantly in Athens where we have been working for several years in partnership with the Greek Orthodox Church.

Some Reflections on the EU Debate

In closing I want to offer some personal reflections on the EU debate and 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 did not know whether the prevailing administrative culture would be German or French. To my surprise, it was neither. It was British. You knew pretty quickly with the Germans and the French which political party they were from. With the British, you never knew.

Romano Prodi's point was that the British brought to the European Union the highest levels of administrative professionalism and thereby exerted an influence much greater than their compatriots sometimes realised. For those British men and women who have contributed their skills and expertise over many decades to building these institutions, the Brexit vote is a heavy blow. Some people in my diocese have been pleased with the result of the referendum. But many others have expressed shame, anger, grief.

I was sad that so much of the Referendum debate seemed to take place at such a low level. Both sides of the campaign indulged in exaggeration and untruths. Moreover, the result seemed to say much more about internal tensions in the UK than it did about people's true feelings towards Europe. I attended recently the General Synod which had an emergency debate on Europe in the light of the vote. I was struck that speaker after speaker lined up to talk about inequality, deprivation, social division. Almost nobody spoke about Europe. One of the tragedies of Brexit is that Britain had so much that it could have contributed to Europe, but it appears instead, to wish to walk away.

Yet, whatever we think of the modern political institutions of Europe – and they, of course, are far from perfect – Britain is undeniably a part of the European continent. We have a shared history and much of that history is bound up with the Christian faith.

So I want to finish with some famous words, from John Donne the British poet and divine who had a major influence on the civilised and civilising development of the Anglican Church. He represents the voice of an island people, and his words (in his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation XVII*) offer hope to all of us as Europe contemplates its future and to the Christian Church as it aspires to the particular vocation of being the soul of Europe.

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in

mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

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