

## Address to Eastern Archdeaconry Synod 24<sup>th</sup> September 2016

We live in an era of globalisation, and some of us now have children who live in different continents. Our trade is increasingly dependent upon events in China. And our banking systems are interconnected across the world.

We learnt this at our peril a few years back. We realised that our European banks were in fact deeply implicated in the fortunes of middle-American sub-prime mortgages. The collapse of that mortgage market led to the 2008 banking crisis, the effects of which have been profound and sustained. We have been living through a long period of austerity. Europe as a whole has struggled to grow. Interest rates are very low, unemployment, especially youth unemployment, in many countries is high. Wages in Eastern European countries are low. There are large numbers of people who feel poor, disenfranchised and left behind.

Beyond this, parts of our diocese face security or military issues of different kinds. Turkey has undergone an unsuccessful coup and lives with a resurgent pro-Islamic leadership. The Eastern Ukraine remains under Russian occupation. The Balkan States live with a real fear of Russian tanks rolling across their borders. In Western Europe, countries face the threat of terrorism: with bombings in Paris and Brussels and a mass-killing in Nice.

In this context, it is not surprising that people respond by expressing the desire to 'take back control'. There is a longing for strong leaders who will protect us from external threats. There is a rising fear of foreigners and migrants who compete with us for work and social benefits. Populism is on the rise across Europe – with right wing governments in Croatia and Hungary, for example, and the expectation of a right wing president in Austria.

Whilst the longing for strong leaders and protection from foreigners is understandable it also highly dangerous. Europe saw in the 1930s where these kinds of forces can lead. I recently met the RC Archbishop of Serbia, and he suggested to me that a younger generation of Christian leaders and bishops across Europe need to unite to warn and to resist. I relayed that suggestion to the Church of England College of bishops when it met a couple of weeks ago.

It is precisely the desire to 'take back control' that was the principal factor motivating Brexit. It was expressed either in concerns about sovereignty, or about migration or simply as a protest against the status quo. I have been in two big church debates about Brexit – one in the General Synod and one in the College of Bishops, and the thing that has struck me both times is that most speakers wanted to talk about the condition of the UK, not about Europe. I have started to form the impression that the vote was not about the EU, it could have been about *anything* that seemed to give people some chance of gaining back control.

A study by the Joseph Rowntree foundation has shown how the Brexit vote exposed divisions in British society between richer and poorer, better and less well educated, older and younger. It further increases the cultural if not political separation between England and Scotland. And it introduces a serious problem for Ireland with the political and potentially security issues associated with an External EU border running between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. The actual leaving of Britain from the EU will take two years from when Article 50 is triggered. But renegotiation of thousands of trade deals will take many more years than that. So whereas David Cameron envisaged the Brexit vote as the way of ending his political difficulties it has in fact opened some of the biggest, strategic political issues that the UK has faced since WW2.

It is clear that, whilst Theresa May insists that Brexit means Brexit, no-one knows what Brexit means. That's to say, it is not clear what sort of relationship with the EU Britain wants and there is at present no plan for getting there. All this has to be developed.

How might Brexit affect British residents in the EU? Well the immediate devaluation of sterling against the Euro has hit retired Brits living in Spain and rural France. They are feeling poorer. People are concerned about residence rights, rights to health care, legal rights, employment rights. Pensioners are worried about whether their UK pensions will be frozen at the level they were when they left the UK (as happens if you retire outside the EU). It could be that employing clergy will become more complex. Will we need work visas? Will there need to be arrangements for interim health cover before local health schemes kick in?

I met recently with Lord Bridges, the minister in the House of Lords responsible for the Brexit negotiations. He listened sympathetically to my concerns. He indicated that the government is keen to engage with the church and open to hear our ideas. Specifically, he offered to run a roundtable in Brussels so he could hear the concerns of diocesan clergy and lay people directly. I will certainly be taking him up on that offer, and if anyone from this archdeaconry is interested in attending do say.

The UK government's position is that the status of British people living in the EU will be taken into account in negotiations under the principle of reciprocity. That's to say, Britain will be offering to give rights to foreign nationals living in Britain that match the rights given to British people living in the EU. That will be important to countries like Poland which has many of its citizens living and working in Britain. I hope that we will be able to keep the maximum level of freedom of movement between EU countries and the best conditions of trade. I have to say that at the moment it is not looking optimistic – if anything the politics seem at present to be favouring a 'hard Brexit' that will put real controls on the free movement of peoples and by implication restrict trade.

Brexit is a wake-up call to the rest of the EU. In conditions of austerity, the EU has to be seen to be delivering real benefit to the peoples of Europe. It needs to be seen as open and listening. Personally, I think that the European Commission has not yet adequately demonstrated this. The recent proposal to create a European army, for example, over-estimates the extent to which ordinary people feel a sense of loyalty to the EU. You don't send your young people to go into battle and risk losing blood and lives unless the entity for which you are fighting elicits a high degree of patriotism.

That is something of the social and political context. Let me say now something about the Diocese in Europe context. We are a minority church in all the countries in which we operate. We cater in the first instance for people who want to worship in English. But we also welcome people who feel at home in an Anglican setting, and who want to worship in their own language, like the Anglican community here in Krakow or the Turkish-speaking Church of the Resurrection in Istanbul. The character of each of our 7 archdeaconries is very different. Our Eastern Archdeaconry consists mainly of smaller, highly international, highly diverse congregations mostly located in capitals and other big cities. Getting organised, registered and structured, and finding ordained ministry, is a challenge in the East.

Because we are a minority church, relations with the big majority church are important. Mostly in the East, this is the Orthodox Church, sometimes the Catholic Church. I would want to say that relations at the highest levels between ourselves and several Orthodox churches as well as the RC church are excellent. The Archbishop of Canterbury has a close personal friendship with the Ecumenical Patriarch. At the recent Sant Egidio Conference in Assisi the ABC, the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch appeared alongside one another. Both the Russian and Serbian Patriarchs are visiting Lambeth Palace

next month. The Hungarian RC Archbishop visited Lambeth as part of a much bigger delegation earlier this year. This kind of relationship sometimes has very tangible results. So, through the direct intervention of the Russian Orthodox Patriarch we have finally received a long usage agreement for St. Andrew's church building in Moscow. We might contrast that with Turkey, where relationships between the churches and the state are difficult and where, as a result, land ownership and registration issues are deeply frustrating.

Over the last couple of years in the Diocese we have been formulating, agreeing and beginning to roll out a diocesan strategy. One of our strategic aims is to have well-structured archdeaconries. That was especially important in the Eastern Archdeaconry. Combining being priest-in-charge of Vienna with Archdeacon of the East was a task of gargantuan proportions. So we created a full-time, free-standing archdeacon post. This has been hugely beneficial in providing proper oversight and care of chaplaincies which, as I indicated, are often fragile.

Colin William's responsibilities, as Archdeacon of the East, include the fleshing out of the diocesan strategy, and he will be speaking to us about this in a moment. But I want to say that from its very beginning, this has been a bottom-up strategy that reflects the activity and aspirations of the whole diocese. Its genesis lay in a brain-storming session of reps of all seven archdeaconries. The worst thing that could happen to the strategy is that it is turned on its head and looks like something centrally imposed. In this diocese especially, the growth is at the tips. The success or failure of the strategy therefore depends crucially on how far chaplaincies engage with it. Colin will be saying more about this shortly.

However, I do want to pick up one element of the strategy, that I need to say something about, and that is safeguarding. I remember from last year's synod that safeguarding was one of the big concerns of this archdeaconry. For me, safeguarding is rooted in Jesus's particular concern for those whom he describes as 'the little ones'. Jesus gave a surprising and counter-cultural priority to children. More generally, the gospel is especially intended as good news for the vulnerable, the marginal the dispossessed.

However, in recent decades it has become apparent that the church in Europe has not cared as it should have done for children and vulnerable people. As a direct result, in some countries, trust in the church has plummeted. In Belgium, a recent survey by our leading consumer magazine, showed that the RC church is one of the least trusted institutions in our country – trusted far less than the army, the social services, even politicians. I found that deeply shocking.

So our emphasis on safeguarding is about building a high trust culture. It means establishing systems and procedures that, as far as we can, give people confidence that those of our people who are in positions of trust are genuinely trustworthy.

How do you build trust? In the first instance by being trustworthy. It is by having clergy, pastoral workers and Sunday School leaders who are well motivated, godly and good people. That is the most important thing. But it is also about the organisation of the church validating those who are in positions of trust. That's why we licence our clergy. It's why our clergy live within ethical guidelines enforceable through a disciplinary code. And it is why we are asking volunteers who are in positions of trust to fulfil safeguarding checks. These things provide confidence and they discourage those who might get into positions of trust for the wrong reasons.

I well appreciate that implementing these things in the East has particular difficulties. Actually, Western Europe throws up a different set of difficulties too. But I would urge you to persevere with the process because the aim and the goal are to further and protect the church's mission.

In closing, I want to pay tribute to our clergy and lay officers. Especially in the East, life can feel isolated. As a priest, it can be a challenge just to survive. But we are doing more than surviving. We are growing new congregations – in Krakow here in Poland, and Brno, in the Czech Republic. We are planning on a new full-time appointment in Izmir in Southern Turkey. We are doing amazing work with refugees in several places, most notably Athens but other places too. We have some challenges: how to provide sustainable ministry in St. Petersburg? And Kiev? But my dominant note is thanksgiving. I close with St. Paul's words to the Christians at Colossae:

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. May you be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”