

The Referendum and Reconciliation

One cannot help but noticing that an important event will be taking place next Thursday: the referendum to decide whether we should remain in the European Union or not. If it not for me here to weigh up the pros and cons of this or to encourage you to vote one way or the other. I imagine we all have our own views on this issue, though we are led to believe that some people are still undecided as to how they will vote.

However, I feel it is appropriate and right to express concern over the way the debate has been pursued on both sides of the argument, particularly by politicians but even in some of the letters to the local press. We may not like it but we rather expect the different political parties to malign each other. From that point of view it has been refreshing to see senior representatives of opposing parties supporting each other publicly on the same platform. What is new, though, and something I do not remember seeing before, is the vitriol with which politicians condemn members of their own party. The saying comes to mind: who needs enemies if you have friends like these.

Not that we as Christians have a particularly good record ourselves. Although church unity is still a way off relations between different denominations have certainly improved dramatically in my lifetime. The really heated and, one has to say sometimes unpleasant, debates have been within the individual denominations themselves – not least our own Church of England.

That of course is not new, as we heard in St Paul's plea to the Christians in Corinth in our Bible reading just now. Already in the infant church there were different opposing factions. Paul appeals to them to break down these divisions and to work together. Only then can they effectively proclaim and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whatever the outcome of the referendum there will be much pain and hurt to be healed. A concerted effort for reconciliation will be required. Politicians and others will need to be able to work together for the common good of this country and beyond. But who will be the reconcilers? I would hope that the churches will be able to play a part in that task. Church leaders, yes – and perhaps particularly our own archbishops and bishops – but also ordinary Christians in our daily lives. May God give us the strength and the courage to share in his reconciling love.

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