

*Read the article below:*

At the heart of Britain's Christian heritage are certain glorious principles. They are what make the best of our nation, whether we are Christians, of another faith or of no faith. They come from Jesus' teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes.

Among those principles are a vision of peace and reconciliation, to being builders of bridges, not barriers. We demonstrated it in the years after 1945. The vision of the founders of the European Union was also peace and reconciliation, and alongside NATO and OSCE it worked and continues to work. Peace and reconciliation exist in Western Europe today. It is the greatest cause for thankfulness that we can imagine. It is a blessing to be shared with the whole world.

The principles Jesus taught and which have so shaped us also include love for the poor, the alien and the stranger. The EU came together in a Europe broken beyond description by war, and has shaped a continent which until recently has contributed to more human flourishing, and more social care, than at any time in European history.

Jesus taught us to love our neighbour, and when questioned about what that meant gave the extraordinary story of the Good Samaritan. In that story the one who turns out to be a neighbour is the one who shows respect, mercy and love to the stranger, even to an enemy.

On 6th June we passed the 72nd anniversary of D-Day, the great battle which was so significant in ending Nazi occupation of Western Europe. My father-in-law, Douglas Eaton, landed just after H Hour. He showed the family where he had fought, and we went to the cemetery where some of his unit were buried, a cemetery shared with German war dead. As he looked at the rows of graves of young men of both sides it was one of the very few moments when I saw him struggle for composure. There was no hatred, just sadness at such losses. He was pleased that Germans and British were buried together.

At the end of June, just after the referendum on our membership of the EU, there will be an act of remembrance at Thiepval. It is a memorial to the roughly one million casualties on all sides in the Battle of the Somme in 1916, over 400,000 of them British and Commonwealth. To that million, of course, one must add even more who carried to the grave the mental and emotional scars.

When he joined up, as a Territorial in 1938, for my father-in-law it was for something profound. He wanted to defend Britain, and on D Day, he remembered feeling a sense that freeing Europe was the aim. Many at the Somme had similar feelings. How those who fought would vote in the Referendum is both unknowable and likely as varied as how people today will vote on 23rd June. No-one can conscript them to one side or the other.

The 23rd June is a date on which we happily do not literally have to fight for our freedom or future, but we are going to make a choice that will change the lives of all of us, and the next generations, both for this country and indirectly for much of Europe. That choice should be made with the same ambition and vaulting idealism as those who gave so much in both wars.

Sacrifice, generosity, vision beyond self-interest, suffering for others, helping the helpless, these are some of the deeply Christian principles that have shaped us. They are principles that show us at our best, as an example to other countries, as a home of freedom and democracy, as a

beacon of hope that shines around a dark world. They are forward looking virtues. Those who fought in two world wars were not looking back but forward. Those who built the EU after the two wars, in which millions of Europeans had died, looked forward.

The vision for our future cannot be only about ourselves. We are most human when we exist for others.

This referendum seems to me to be so important because it is about our vision of what kind of country we are, for ourselves and for the world. Both sides in the Referendum have a vision for our nation, based in different ways on the principles I have written about.

To be a country for the world is part of the calling of being British. Economics are massively important, so is migration, but they are not everything, although they are the signs of the values we have.

During the debates certain things seem to have emerged:

- In terms of vision and ambition for human flourishing the EU is no longer what it used to be. It needs renewed vision, major reforms.
- It seems likely that the most probable economic effect of leaving would be negative in the short to medium term. Prosperity should not be the final aim for us but its lack affects what we can do as a nation, how we are able to care for those in need here and elsewhere.
- Immigration is a major concern for very many people. It must be addressed honestly but we must not succumb to our worst instincts.

The language in the campaign has been very blunt, but this is the question of a generation, and merits passionate campaigning. Personally, I have huge respect for politicians on both sides as they seek to put their case, a case in which they genuinely believe, and which they know matters hugely. Apart from anything else those who pray should pray for them all, especially given the strain they face.

There is no official Christian or church line on which way to vote. Voting is a matter for each person's conscience. Two things are sure. Each of us should turn out and vote if we can. And after the referendum we must come together as one people to make the solution we choose work well.

Hard words (and I expect even this article may cause me to receive those) must not create enduring bitterness. Those who have led both sides have done so with courage and determination. Whatever the outcome the Church of England will continue to love and support communities and nation as it always has done, and will seek the greatest human flourishing for all.

It would seem less than transparent, having written this, not to say where I stand. It is not said with the desire to tell others how to vote. In no sense do I have some divine hot line to the right answer. We each have to make up our own minds. But for my part, based on what I have said and on what I have experienced I shall vote to remain.

I hope and pray that the result will be reached with the aim of a good Britain in a good Europe, whether as part of the EU or not. I pray that each person's vote will be based on generosity, hope, confidence. I pray that we will then reunite with immense determination to be a gift to the world of today and to future generations.

