

Working Notes

facts and analysis of
social and economic issues

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Perspectives on Europe

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Ireland, Europe and Catholic Social Teaching: Shared Values?

Cathy Molloy

No Irish in EU?

In May this year, on the last stretch of the ancient pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, etched on a large stone, for all to see, were the words 'No Irish in EU'. The pilgrim route celebrates St James the Apostle and has been walked by Christians for well over a thousand years, and by Kerry men since the 1400s!¹ Given the history of Irish Christianity, and its importance in the founding of Europe from the 6th century, it shocks to realise that in 2009 there are people who do not want us in the European Union.

In the recent European elections voters in the 27 member states elected 736 members of the European Parliament. This exercise in multi-national democracy must surely be a beacon and chart a path for human progress into the future, according to John Bruton, former Taoiseach and present EU Ambassador to the United States:

The direct election of a European Parliament may be a sign of things to come in global governance. Most political and economic developments that affect our daily lives nowadays are shaped by global forces, forces which are beyond the full control of even the largest national democracies. If rules made to govern global forces are to have democratic legitimacy we will have to extend democracy above the level of the nation state.²

An important question for Irish people opposed to participation in the European Union has been the fear of loss of identity. This fear is very human and operates at many levels, from the group of two and fear of loss of self that can be destructive in a marriage or other intimate relationship, to the fear of loss of identity or autonomy that we see in discussions of mergers, of companies or banks, children's hospitals or Universities. And yet we do not gravitate towards others because we believe cooperation to be harmful, or because we want to be less efficient or impede progress, (understood as the well-being and flourishing of ourselves and others) but because experience has shown that cooperation and working together acknowledges and articulates shared values and goals, and is essential in achieving and living out of them.

What is true of the individual is also true of the group, and indeed the nation and the nations.

In the 1950s Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, French philosopher, scientist and Jesuit priest, wrote in *The Phenomenon of Man*:

To be fully ourselves we must advance in the opposite direction, in the direction of convergence with all other beings, towards a union with what is other than ourselves. The perfection of our own being, the full achievement of what is unique in each one of us, lies not in our individuality but in our personality; and because of the evolutionary structure of the world we can find that personality only in union with others.³

Values of the European Economic Community

After the devastation of two world wars, those who set up the European Economic Community envisaged a new way of being European, in which unity and difference would be reflected and lived out. It was a practical cooperation that sought an end to wars and to benefit the member states at the economic level, while promoting peace between the nation states. The principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, guided the first phase of what is now the European Union. The older among us can remember the excitement and the novelty of the concept even if Ireland was simply looking on at that stage. Peace has been achieved along with progressive improvement in international relations and standards of living for the peoples of that first community of nations. Now, new questions have emerged and issues such as globalisation, climate change, sustainable development, call for new cooperation at European level and between Europe and the world.

When Ireland joined in 1973 there had been much debate as to what we might lose in terms of our hard-won independence and newly-found sovereignty *vis a vis* the gains of actively participating in the construction of Europe and

European affairs. Our first elected European politicians were a source of pride to the vast majority of the Irish people and the gains at the economic level – for example access to markets for our goods and services that relieved us of our over-dependence on Britain – became quickly evident across many areas of Irish life. Perhaps the biggest gain was at the level of national pride and self-esteem. There was a palpable sense of a new equality that taking our place among the democratic nations of Europe afforded, even if no one suggested that the EU was the answer to all our ills – as reports of radical injustice perpetrated on individuals and groups in our society by our most trusted institutions continue to show. Our own systems and structures, across a range of areas, still impede the achievement of our stated aims.

The strong connection between Catholic social teaching and the EU is probably little known in Irish society ...

But there are areas where improvements are directly related to our being a European Member State – consumer and environmental protection, standards in building and food production, improved roads and public transport. Maybe even more significant is the developing legislation on gender equality. Equality between men and women was one of the founding articles of the Treaty of Rome, and the achievement of gender equality became a central task of the EU under the Amsterdam Treaty.

It is interesting to recall some of the basic things that have been achieved for women, now taken for granted by a younger generation, through our belonging in the EU. The right to remain at work after marriage, to have infant children named on a mother's passport, to take out a bank loan subject to the same conditions as others, to equal pay (although a gender-related pay gap of 13-17 per cent shows the distance to go), maternity leave, etc have all come about in a relatively short time. Conditions and terms of employment generally are greatly improved and many have availed of exchange programmes for study or work within the EU.

Catholic social teaching, Ireland and the EU

The strong connection between Catholic social teaching and the EU is probably little known in Irish society, church members included. The Christian roots of Europe are strongly present in the founding and subsequent Treaties of the Union. In a 2005 article 'The Real Third Way', David Begg, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, noted that Catholic social teaching had a major influence on the European Union, and that most social policy development in Ireland in the last thirty years was driven by the European Union. 'It is a measure of the extent to which the domestic interpretation of that teaching was out of line with mainstream European Catholic opinion'. Begg cites Garret FitzGerald, in *Reflections on the Irish State*:

The traditional concern of Roman Catholic teaching with excessive emphasis on individualism has in many ways been a very constructive force in the world. But in the context of the Irish Constitution this concern can be argued to have led in practice to a new imbalance in the other direction, that is to a situation in which the right to private property is given a higher value than the right to personal liberty, and in which the ultimate right of the family (defined in a very specific and exclusive way as the family based on marriage), is given a priority over the rights of children.⁴

For a strongly Catholic country the social teaching of that faith has come to us by a circuitous route. Those who question the particular nature of Irish Catholicism in the light of the present situation certainly have a point, and reference to Catholic social teaching as the Church's best kept secret' is particularly apposite in relation to Ireland. Its basis is belief in the equal dignity of each human person, and in the right of each one to share in the goods of the earth.⁵

Each human person is in the 'image and likeness of God', who is source or origin and end of all.⁶ Our being is gift – given and received, reflected in the relational and social dimension of human nature, meaning that in our most fundamental being we are oriented towards God and our fellow human beings.⁷ Giving and receiving is part of who we are, and, in spite of our lapses and shortcomings, greed and self-interest, the tendency towards generosity will not be extinguished.

Desire for the common good, ('the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily') may be blocked, frustrated or indeed fulfilled, by individual and collective action, but it is an essential element of human being.⁸

This is a very particular view of the human person whose innate dignity means that she or he may never be objectified, but must always be a subject with inalienable rights. It is to state the obvious to note that the Ryan Report is evidence that not alone were these fundamental tenets of Christianity not practised, but it would seem that neither were they taught – to the so-called faithful in general nor to those who would be the future leaders of the Irish church. *A la carte* Catholicism did not begin with the controversy over contraception, and the relatively recent emphasis on social justice in the church will need to be widened and broadened by the teaching church if it is to have credibility in the Ireland and the world of today and tomorrow.

Solidarity and Subsidiarity

Two important principles, **solidarity** – that we are all really responsible for all, and **subsidiarity** – that decision making should happen at the lowest practicable level, underlie this body of teaching which stretches from the late nineteenth century to the present.⁹ Both principles are operative in the working of the EU. Today there are issues of global importance which cannot be adequately addressed by individual nations, small or big, and our hope lies in finding ways to cooperate. The enlarged European Union, with all its settling down processes, represents a major step-change in the attempt to bring about peace and justice and improved social and economic conditions for the member states, while looking also to the responsibility of the EU to developing countries.

Solidarity in Catholic social teaching means something quite specific:

*... it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all.*¹⁰

The solidarity at the heart of European integration involves commitment to reducing the differences in conditions between the various regions. The

Regional Policy, channelled money from wealthier to poorer member states to the great benefit of Ireland. New member states, Poland for example, are experiencing for the first time some of the benefits we have had for many years, and, despite recession and increasing levels of unemployment, there is no suggestion that we might revert to pre EU membership conditions. But EU solidarity extends beyond the borders of Europe. The EU as the world's largest donor is responsible for more than 50 per cent of global development aid, and, in 2000, trade barriers were lifted to permit access to European markets for products from some of the world's poorest countries. Solidarity in the Lisbon Treaty means also that member states are committed to helping one another in a situation of terrorism threat, or natural or man-made disaster, but only at the request of the individual Government. This illustrates the exercise of subsidiarity, another basic principle of Catholic social teaching, and an important element in the governing of the EU.

The financial recession here and elsewhere clearly illustrates the incapacity of individual nations to 'go it alone' ...

The principle of **subsidiarity** finds significant place in the EU Treaties, including Lisbon which contains a specific Protocol on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality. This Protocol aims at ensuring that decision-making within the community is brought as close to the citizen as possible and involves a stronger role for national and regional parliaments in the EU legislative process. For example, Article 4 of the protocol states that legislative drafts should be shared with national parliaments at the same time, so that they can consider the subsidiarity implications of each draft, regional and local. This puts an onus on local parliamentarians to get more involved than heretofore. The aim of allowing the Community to act if a problem cannot be adequately settled by Member States acting on their own has to be held alongside that to uphold the authority of the Member States in areas that cannot be dealt with more effectively by Community action. And there are mechanisms for subsidiarity to be monitored.¹¹

The ongoing financial recession here and elsewhere clearly illustrates the incapacity of individual nations to ‘go it alone’, or to solve this multi-faceted crisis. Albeit the causes carried predictable outcomes, and could be traced to specific individual and group actions, there is general agreement that there is systemic failure. Repairing, or indeed transforming, the system, to bring about just solutions, will require a degree of cooperation needing the complexity and creativity of some of the best thinkers at home and abroad. The interconnectedness of people and peoples demands nothing less. But there are other matters requiring an unprecedented degree of cooperation which cannot be adequately dealt with by individual countries. Examples are Environmental Protection and Climate Change, and International Crime, such as Trafficking in Persons.

Climate Change, Catholic social teaching and the EU

There is growing concern across the world about the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change caused by methods of production and models of consumption which went unchallenged for too long. We see the results in disturbed weather patterns, drought, crop-failure, and displacement of people.

On July 10th 2009 the leaders of 8 major economies (at the G8 Summit) agreed the target level for climate change. This marks a major breakthrough in international cooperation, with Russia, the US and Japan now party to the agreement. It had been hoped that China and India, as two major developing countries, would sign up to cut global emissions by 50 per cent by 2050. Instead they want the developed states to first pledge hundreds of billions of euro in aid to help them cope with the effects of climate change and to introduce new technology to cut emissions.¹²

The social teaching, focusing on the centrality of the human person, speaks of development and the duties arising from our relationship to the environment.¹³ The Christian perspective is that we may responsibly use the gifts of nature to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. The reminder that projects for integral human development must be marked by solidarity and intergenerational justice, particularly regarding non-renewable sources of energy, involves a call

to international leaders to act jointly, and to a serious review of contemporary life-style. The justice issues involved are not just for the future – the economic and social costs of using up shared resources must be borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or by future generations.



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Solidarity here takes on new and urgent meaning as scientists have warned that the consequences of irreversible climate change will be devastating for global food supplies and ecosystems. The fact that some of the poorest and most fragile communities will be worst affected in the short term is already evident and there are issues of global justice to be addressed in that the richest countries are causing the greater part of the problems, for which the poor are paying in lack of food security and displacement resulting from drought. There are apparent contradictions in wealthy countries allocating money for aid to developing countries without seriously reducing their own part in causing the need for that aid.

In his pamphlet *Three challenges Only Europe can take on*, Pierre Defraigne, (Economist and Honorary Director-General at the European Commission), notes:

*our excessive dependence on fossil fuels has exposed us to a triple threat: climate deterioration, a shortage following the interruption in energy supplies which would paralyse Europe, and conflicts over sources of hydrocarbon energy and control of their access routes, be they maritime or pipeline.*¹⁴

He calls on the EU, to lead in the area of energy savings and renewable energies, and to show a greater solidarity: ‘Profound changes in our way of life are inevitable as our models of production and consumption are incompatible either with the ecological equilibrium of the planet or with the

economic development of the South, or both’.

Defraigne points out that the EU needs to consider and to come up with some answers as to whether future sharing of increasingly rare energy resources is to be managed by way of either the market, which favours the wealthiest who would continue to waste while others would be deprived of the indispensable, through conflict and military control of wells, shipping lanes and pipelines, or, through negotiation and cooperation leading to agreements on distribution and solidarity, including transfer of technology. The benefits, indeed the absolute necessity, of being part of international policy making on climate change are self-evident. Less evident is how our EU membership affects the modern day slave trade called Trafficking in Persons, in which Ireland is now a player.

Trafficking in Persons: Ireland and the EU

High-profile cases have raised awareness of trafficking in Ireland, both for sexual exploitation and cheap labour purposes. Recent research on the trafficking of women into Ireland for sexual exploitation looks at the incorporation of a highly lucrative global sex industry into Ireland, where organisers are linked to international criminal networks and facilitate the marketing of women for prostitution.¹⁵ The findings in relation to the harms done to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of trafficked women and girls would be the focus of a different article, as would the findings in relation to the men who buy sex. Pertinent to the topic here is the change in conditions since Ireland has begun to cooperate at European and International level on this issue.

The Criminal Law Human Trafficking Act 2008 has roots in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and also the EU Framework Decision on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, and the EU Framework Decision on Combating Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography. These Decisions are binding on Ireland as a Member State. Ireland had signed the UN Protocol in 2000 yet it took several years and considerable pressure before it became law. Now we have the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit in the *Garda Síochána* and are members of the G6 Human Trafficking Initiative to ensure that the EU becomes a hostile environment for criminals engaged in trafficking – alongside Poland,

Netherlands, Italy, UK. and Spain.¹⁶

Until recently in Ireland victims were often criminalised as illegal immigrants, imprisoned and deported, and traffickers went free. Now there are obligations on Member States to protect and promote the rights of victims including the right to a period of recovery, medical care, counselling. Initiatives in some Member States address the demand side of prostitution and Sweden has shown a lead in criminalising the purchasers of sex rather than the victims of trafficking and prostitution.

Conclusion

If the common critique of the EU, as not living up to its own rhetoric, being a ‘rich men’s club’, overly bureaucratic and with an obvious democratic deficit is to be proved wrong there is much to be worked at both in real terms and in perception.

We take for granted European cooperation in many areas today. The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice is a member of SCRIBANI, a European group of Jesuit Social Centres, the benefits of which are considerable in terms of social analysis and reflection on issues of significance for their work. Not to cooperate and pool knowledge, resources and information becomes unthinkable in the light of the local and global problems we face today. What is good at micro level is even more important at the level of Governance where norms and laws reflecting shared values, recognising interdependence and governing cooperation can work to bring about a Europe based on democracy, and a sustainable future rooted in peace with justice which is desired by the growing number of Member States.

Notes

1. Gerald O’Carroll, *The Pocket History of Kerry*, Tralee: Polymath Press, 2007, p.12.
2. Weekly message from Ambassador John Bruton, June 2nd 2009, http://www.eurunion.org/eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3410&Itemid=57
3. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, tr. Fontana Books, 1965, p. 289.
4. David Begg, ‘The Real ‘Third Way’’, in Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, *Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2005, p. 30.
5. It is perhaps precisely this that makes so shocking the revelations of the destruction of human dignity of so many people at the hands of those who professed to be their

carers in the name of Christianity.

6. See Gerry O'Hanlon SJ, *The Recession and God*, Dublin: Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice and Messenger Publications, 2009, part 5, God Matters, pp. 31-50, for implications of God/human relationship.
7. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Veritas, 2005, pp. 54-55.
8. *Ibid.*, p.79.
9. Catholic social teaching is considered to begin with Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum, On the Condition of Labour*, 1891, addressing inhuman working conditions of the industrial revolution.
10. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, The Social Concerns of the Church, 38, 1988.
11. The Lisbon Treaty, Protocol on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality, Article 4. See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/12007L/htm/C2007306EN.01015001.htm>
12. Jamie Smyth, Various Articles, *Irish Times*, July 9/10 2009. (For example, 'G8 Leaders Agree on Target Level for Climate Change')
13. Encyclical Letter, *Caritas In Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI, Vatican, June 2009, 49-50.
14. *Three Challenges Only Europe can take on*, Pierre Defraigne, La Libre Belgique/Madriaga – College of Europe Foundation, May 2009, p. 26.
15. kelleherassociates in association with Monica O'Connor and Jane Pillinger, *Globalisation, Sex Trafficking and Prostitution: the Experiences of Migrant Women in Ireland*, report of research funded by the Religious Sisters of Charity, published by The Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009.
16. Framework Decisions are used to align laws and regulations of the member States. Proposals are made on the initiative of the Commission or a member state and they have to be adopted unanimously. They are binding on the member States as to the result to be achieved but leave the choice of form and method to the national authorities. See: http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/framework_decisions.

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