

The EU Referendum Some Ground Rules for Christians 23 February 2016

The EU referendum will be on 23 June. Christians will be campaigning on both sides. It is not for the Church to tell people how to vote, but one part of our role is to help Christians think and pray about the issues. So here are some initial thoughts on the subject for your prayers and consideration.

Christians need to engage in the debate. Just because the Church does not speak with one voice, this does not mean Christians should be silent. The outcome of this vote will shape the future of our nation and make a massive difference to all who live here. It matters, and we need to recognise this and act accordingly.

Nobody speaks for God on this issue. No matter how convinced you are that God wants the UK to be in or out of Europe, other Christians just as devout as you will be on the other side and just as convinced of God's support. You may be convinced that God agrees with you, but that is not an argument for your position and it is not a helpful thing to say. Of course we each believe that God is on our side, so let us accept this and get on with talking about the reasons why we believe it to be so.

The decision comes down to a series of judgement calls. We mostly share the same values, and the differences come down to matters of judgement: I think that *this* issue is more important than *that* one; I think that *this* outcome is more likely than *that* one. Some of us will have our predictions confirmed, but only after the decision has been made. And nobody can offer any objective test to determine which issues should be given greater weight than others. We can disagree about matters of judgement without suggesting that those we disagree with are bad, insane or stupid.

Our faith should affect the way we campaign. We may not all come to the same conclusion, but we can engage with the issues and the people involved in a loving and sensitive way. We may disagree, but we can do so with dignity and respect, so that when the vote is over and the decision made, no damage will have been done to relationships within the Body of Christ or to our witness to those presently outside the Body of Christ.

Our faith should affect the things we care about. Much of the discussion so far has been about Sovereignty (who makes the rules?), Success (how will the economy grow the fastest?) and Security (which option carries the greatest risk?). All these things will, of course, matter to the members of the Christian community, just as they do to everyone else. But there are other areas which we as Christians should also be concerned about.

Our primary loyalty is to another King. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God; we bow the knee to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We have many other loyalties: to our country, to our friends and family, to our denomination and employer, and so on. But Jesus has to come first. And, sometimes, this means that we cannot do what our family or friends or employer or country want us to do; it must affect how we understand debates about national sovereignty.

Our God loves the world. I am called to work for the good of my family, my city and my nation; but this does not mean I can seek to harm others – or, through my inactivity, allow others to come to harm. We pray for our Father to ‘guide this nation *and all nations* in the ways of justice and of peace’. We seek the wellbeing of all. This has to affect how we balance the various promised benefits and threatened risks that each side presents us with.

Our God has a preference for the poor. Maybe you would want to re-phrase that a bit differently, but the essential point is clear: He really cares about how we treat the weak, the poor and the powerless; He cares about what we do with the planet. Economic success is a good thing to aim for, but we must always remember that other things are more important.

We are called to exercise servant leadership. Whatever power and influence we have, it has been given to us not so that we can benefit and prosper but so that we may serve and bless others. As a Christian, I cannot make decisions based only on what seems best for me, my people and my nation. For all our problems and struggles, we live in a successful and rich country: the key question is how God wants to use the many resources He has given us.

God is still on the throne. Yes, this is probably the most important decision our country will face in a generation. But whether the decision goes the ‘right’ way or the ‘wrong’ way, we are called to love and serve the people around us, to work and pray for God’s Kingdom to be made real, to be lived and experienced here and now.

Our task will not change. Whatever the outcome of the vote, our task remains the same, as does the presence and power of the Spirit. The wrong vote will not prevent the coming of God’s Kingdom. The referendum matters, but other things matter more.

So there are some initial thoughts. Does this resonate with what the Spirit is saying to you? What else do we need to hear at this time? Do let me know.

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