

Chelmsford Cathedral

The Keene Lectures 2006

'Faith in Europe?'

2: The Church and the States we are in

Sir Stephen Wall

It is an honour to be invited to speak in a cathedral dedicated to St Cedd, who was born in Northumberland, where I have a home. Cedd was at the Synod of Whitby and was one of those who wanted to keep the Irish date for Easter. But when the synod decided in favour of the Roman date Cedd accepted the decision in the interest of Church unity. He is therefore an appropriate patron for this lecture.

"For every boy and every girl that's born into this world alive is either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative".

Do you remember that guardsman's song from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*? Of course, even in its day, it was a joke but it was a joke reflecting an underlying fact of Victorian life: the political world divided into two camps and you were in one or the other. Something similar could have been said of religion in Britain fifty years ago.

My father was what might be called a lapsed Methodist. My mother was a Roman Catholic, her father having converted to Catholicism after hearing Cardinal Newman preach. When my parents got engaged in 1931, my father's (Methodist) aunt wrote to him to remind him that in the churchyard in Derbyshire where he lived were buried generations of members of the Wall family: "yeoman stock; the very backbone and breath of England" as she put it. She begged my father not to dishonour that heritage by agreeing to have the children of his marriage brought up as Catholics. On a personal level, she ended her letter, I hope you will be very happy!

The fact that I am here, brought up as a Roman Catholic, and still a Catholic, I suppose confirms that my great aunt's worst fears were all too justified. But what actually was she talking about? My father's family had been what would have been called yeoman farmers in Derbyshire since the late middle ages so would have gone, like everyone else, to Mass each Sunday up to the Reformation. One of my lateral relatives, John Wall, was the last Catholic priest to be hanged at Tyburn. And yet something sent a frisson down my aunt's spine. My mother used to tell me that her own in laws, my father's parents, had never held it against her that she was a Catholic – as if this was both commendable and surprising.

Had any of these ferociously protective aunts and uncles been asked what it was they were objecting to about Catholicism, they would not have had the first clue about transubstantiation or the Petrine succession or the finer points of Anglican versus Catholic ordination. They would, however, have had a pretty clear idea that the Catholic Church was a continental power, culturally alien and, historically at least, politically

hostile to Britain – or England as they would have called it. And they would not have been half wrong: the Reformation was an act of political, as much as religious, UDI. The subsequent history of the reigns of Mary Tudor, of Elizabeth and, much later, of James II is about power, and the religious symbols attached to power, as much as it is about faith itself. It was not just the return of Catholicism under James that the English establishment objected to but the return of Roman Catholicism with all that that implied – at a time when the Vatican was not just nominally an independent state, but a powerful one among the Kingdoms of Italy. When Bonny Prince Charlie landed in Scotland in 1745, he swept all before him as far as Derby. But he was eventually defeated at Culloden the following year because the English Jacobites he had been counting on failed to materialise and, among the Scottish clans, almost as many fought on the English side as on Prince Charlie's – because they feared the restoration of Catholicism and all that it was believed to entail.

Even today, I do not believe any British government would seek to change the law which does not allow the heir to the throne to marry a Catholic. Now, that has a lot to do with the implications for an established Church of which the monarch is head, but it goes deeper and wider than that.

Of course these sentiments were not all on one side. The return of the Catholic hierarchy to England in the nineteenth century was hardly low key. Cardinal Manning was a famous public figure in his day. His successor, Cardinal Vaughan, built the Catholic Cathedral at Westminster to be the tallest building in London. It was a political statement. And certainly an architectural one. As you come into Victoria Station on the train, it stands out as a landmark even today. At the Convent in Epsom where my sister and I first went to school we were brought up by severe French nuns who, like the English Benedictine monks who later educated me, had fled from secular France to Protestant England to escape persecution. We felt part of a conspicuous minority. It was believed that we suffered discrimination: that, for example, no Catholic child was ever awarded a scholarship to a local grammar school by Surrey County Council. Per contra, my sister told me only recently that she overheard one of the nuns tell my mother that she, my sister, had been placed top in a school exam because, even though she had not been the best candidate “we could not allow a Protestant child to come top”.

That the Catholic Church was the sole authentic embodiment of the Christian faith was instilled into us. The Pope could knock spots off the Archbishop of Canterbury any day. Even to go into an Anglican church was forbidden because it might “be the occasion of scandal”, presumably because it might imply that one Church was as good a way to God as another. God forbid. I remember going on a family outing when I was about seven to see Guildford Cathedral which was then under construction. For the princely sum of half a crown (about 15p) you could write your name on a brick and contribute it to the building. My father duly gave me the money and invited me to write my name on the brick. I said I could not do so because it was, after all, a Protestant brick. My older sister tore me off a strip, not because I lacked sense or charity but because “Daddy will never become a Catholic if you behave like that”. Well, my father never did though I console myself with the thought that my dropping that particular brick did not loom very large among his reasons. I think he concluded that, faced with these warring church parties, hopeful agnosticism was the safest vantage point.

I recount this bit of personal history because it illustrates the extent to which our world has changed in the intervening period. We were then still a Christian society. The

question was not so much whether you were a Christian as what kind of Christian. And if you were not Christian, or Jewish, you might just about admit to being agnostic. To call yourself an atheist was relatively rare and somewhat scandalous. And of course the Christian churches were white. There were some Christian immigrants from the Caribbean, not always welcome in our churches when they first arrived in the 1950s. As to Moslems, Sikhs or Hindus, they were unknown except as citizens of British colonies or former colonies.

It was not, I think, until the sixties that the first serious signs of disaffection began to appear. For the Catholic Church it was a time of growth: new schools and new churches. It was claimed that there were perhaps as many as nine million nominal Catholics in Britain at the peak. But the signs of problems ahead were already there: declining numbers in the Church of England, Catholic priests publicly leaving the priesthood in noticeable numbers and, for Catholics, the watershed of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on birth control. For the first time, the declared policy of the Catholic Church went against, not just the grain of what people wanted to do, but what they thought it right to do. The sense of a Church that was growing out of touch with its own people was compounded by the fact that the sixties were the time when the pillars of the establishment were revealed to have feet of clay. Anthony Eden had been forced to resign after misleading Parliament over Suez in 1956. Harold Macmillan was forced out of office by the Profumo scandal: our leaders were either out of touch or deeply compromised. Church leaders did not escape that trend as people drifted away – encouraged perhaps by the receding threat of nuclear war, by growing prosperity and by scientific enquiry. Bishop John Robinson's book *Honest to God* burst onto the public scene when I was at university in the mid sixties. It was a shocking book. It appeared to suggest that to be a Christian did not mean that you had to believe in a creator God, in the incarnation or the resurrection as historical facts. There was indeed a personal God but He was made by each of us in our own image of Him. We were not made by Him in His image.

If we fast forward to the present day, we find ourselves in a period of huge doubt and anxiety. Right across Europe, Britain included, there has been massive economic and social change. I was about to say "on an unprecedented scale". But that might not be true. After all, in social terms the industrial revolution and the subsequent invention of the steam railway brought about the biggest changes in our society for the best part of a thousand years or more. From the beginning of time human beings had been unable to travel faster than the fastest horse. Suddenly they could cross the entire country in a day. But the changes we have seen have nonetheless been huge. In Britain, we have had to get used to no longer being a world power, let alone *the* great world power. We have had to get *used* to it. I am not sure that, even now, we have come to *terms* with it. We have had to get used to being just one of twenty five European states in the European Union. And we have certainly not come to terms with that. And we are still wrestling with the social and cultural consequences of immigration, compounded by the fact that our model of multiculturalism has not been as successful at integrating all of our citizens as we had hoped and believed.

Let me say something about the European Union because I spent a large part of my adult life professionally mixed up in its affairs. To declare my interest, I am an avowed enthusiast for the European Union. I believe that the underlying concept was one of the most brilliant of post war inventions: the creation of an organisation which would so intertwine the economies of its members that their interdependence would

outweigh their tendency to dangerous international rivalry. More than that, the cleverest part, was to create something that was and is unique among international organisations: one that rests on the independent willingness of nations to pool their sovereignty and, having done so, to create a sufficient number of supra national organisations (the European Commission, the European Court and the European Parliament) to make it difficult for the powerful, large countries to bully the smaller ones and to permit the smaller ones to look the larger ones in the eye.

It is that last part of the concept that we in Britain have always found most difficult. We could, eventually, just about bring ourselves to sign up to the Treaty of Rome and the sharing of sovereignty that it implied. But, having done that, we wanted to go no further. Most of our partners, by contrast, saw the project as being a dynamic one – a few seeing the possibility of a genuine federation (the united states of Europe), others seeing some sort of hybrid where the nation state would remain but where more and more things would be shared in common. We in Britain wanted to do more and more things in common. The accusation often levelled at British governments – that all they have ever wanted is a free trade area, is a travesty. We have always wanted more than a free trade area but we (and we encompasses Thatcher, Major and Blair) have always wanted those steps to be determined by governments alone. The problem is, of course, that if it is left to governments alone you either risk stalemate (as has so often happened in other intergovernmental organisations) or the dominance of the largest countries. For all the member states, there has been a tension between the intergovernmental and the supra national, but for Britain the tension has been greater than for any other member state. The reasons for that are beyond the scope of this lecture but the primacy of parliament as part of our sense of national identity is a big part of it. When some of our partners were advocating that European tax decisions should be taken collectively and by majority vote, I used to remind them that, in England, Parliament had asserted its power over taxation and had done so by cutting off the head of a king. The fact that we are an island that has long resisted continental encroachment – even our suspicion of popery – all play a part. Anything called the Treaty of Rome is bound to raise an English hackle or two.

The European Union is germane to the theme of this lecture because it has created an economic and political entity of which we (Britain) are an important and active member; because it has, if not a social model at least a range of social models that are recognisably European compared with, say, the United States. We all believe in and adhere to the same human rights laws; we share a view about the obligations of government towards its citizens be it in the alleviation of poverty, the provision of social services or the universal availability of health care. It is inconceivable in any country of the European Union that, faced with a natural disaster, the government could face public criticism for doing too *much* to help. And yet that is precisely the criticism that President Bush faced from some quarters in the United States after New Orleans. A section of the Republican Party in America took the view that it is no business of government to come to the aid of its citizens. We in Europe share a view about the merits of soft power rather than hard power. When I say “we”, I mean us, the public. Not necessarily our governments. In Italy and Spain the governments that were in power at the time of the Iraq war have since paid a price at the ballot box. Where we are struggling, individually and collectively, is to work out what is the best response to the economic and social challenges in our society; what is the nature of our identity as Europeans and what is the place of Faith in our society.

The European Union has always been a secular organisation. In five years as Britain's representative to the EU, negotiating with our partners on a daily basis, I never once heard God invoked by any politician. Yet the European Union has its roots in the traditions of Christian Democracy in Europe, it attempts to honour the very Catholic notion of subsidiarity and, for all its faults, has a Christian sense of responsibility. It has the world's largest international aid effort; its richer members give to the poorer through the Structural and Cohesion funds, enshrined in the principle of solidarity. Its culture is profoundly Christian.

This gives rise to paradox. This Christian-rooted Europe would not allow the Italian politician Signor Buttiglione to join the new European Commission because he viewed homosexuality as a sin. This Europe would not allow its Christian roots to be evoked in the draft of the ill-fated Constitutional treaty. So what does its Christianity amount to? I think it is the same phenomenon we find in our own country where, in the last census, over 70% of the population described themselves as Christian which is strange when other surveys suggest that only about 7% of the same population believe in God. In other words, our Christian roots give us a sense of values, a sense of cultural identity and, perhaps, even a sense of ethnic identity. But those things do not necessarily translate into belief in Christ as the Son of God or acceptance of the teaching of Christian Church leaders as uniquely authoritative, never mind infallible.

The European Parliament would not allow Signor Buttiglione both to hold his Catholic view of homosexuality and to hold a job where he would be responsible for the rights of gay people. The same argument is heard in Britain about Ruth Kelly. I think there are two factors at work here. One is an increasing disassociation in people's minds between belief, on the one hand, and the teachings of organised religion on the other. I do not agree with Mr Buttiglione but I do not find it impossible to accept that he could both hold the view he expressed and safeguard the civil rights of all those for whom he had official responsibility. But society as a whole finds the concept of sin, as opposed to illegality, difficult to come to terms with. The other factor is that quite a number of leaders of Christian communities themselves refuse to make a distinction between what is sinful and what is, or, as they see it, should be illegal.

The enlightenment in the eighteenth century was one reaction against a view of the world, micro-managed by God that people found hard to reconcile with horrific events such as the Lisbon earthquake. Secularism has many roots and we cannot escape the fact that, for very many people, the evidence of the existence of God simply does not stack up. And yet the spiritual quest is there in all of us and many people in our own country believe in some kind of transcendental Creator – much to the fury of Richard Dawkins. They are not impervious to the views of religious leaders. I was very struck by the huge media interest in the appointment of Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury. And when he comments on matters of public policy his views frequently make headline news and are rightly seen as authoritative. They make headline news because the Archbishop of Canterbury is head of the worldwide Anglican Communion and one of the most senior figures in British public life. But they are seen as authoritative mainly because people think he talks sense. Belief itself has become increasingly personal – and not just for those who have no faith as such but have a sense of the transcendental and live in hope of something after death, but for people of Faith as well.

This personalisation of belief is something about which the Church of England is, in my view, more grown up than the Catholic Church. One of the criticisms levelled at the Church of England is that it lacks the central authority that the Catholic Church has. The Eames report attempted to suggest that the Archbishop of Canterbury might have more authority over his peers. And it was given fairly short shrift on that account. Pope Benedict is believed to favour a smaller Church of strict adherents rather than a larger Church where, truth, as he sees it is open to individual interpretation, not central, God-given, authority. You cannot spend long in the company of Catholic bishops without hearing about the *magisterium*.

But on what do those certainties rest? On the belief that Christ guides his Church and all of us who are Christians believe that Christ does so. Yet the certainties of the Church's teaching, as well as disputes as to which bit of God's Church has the monopoly of truth, have given rise to injustice and suffering as well as to good. And when my certainty confronts your certainty events like the 30 years' war ensue. And some of the certainties are not immutable. As a boy, if I had eaten a Bovril sandwich on a Friday and choked to death on it I would have gone to hell for breaking the rule of no meat on Friday. Now, I can choke on that same sandwich and die in a perfect state of Grace.

That is a trivial example. But there are many others that are less trivial. A whole series of things combines to discredit the Church or, more properly the Churches in the eyes of believers and non believers. I have yet to hear a theological argument which persuades me that there is a real case against the ordination of women. And I have no hesitation in making my own mind up on the subject. I have heard plenty of argument in my own Church on the issue of whether it is more sinful to use a condom and to prevent conception than not to use one and cause death through HIV/Aids. It is not surprising that more and more of us make up our own minds on these issues, guided by Christian teaching but not governed by the doctrine of our particular Christian church. That has huge implications for how we manage our relationship with other Faiths in our society.

The Vatican spoke out against "aggressive secularism", which it held responsible for the fact that Signor Buttiglione was barred by the European Parliament from becoming a European Commissioner. I think, in reality, Signor Buttiglione fell into a bit of a trap and, finding himself in a hole, reached for the nearest spade and started digging. But there is a predicament for all of us in the States and societies in which we live: and that is the extent to which our faith should inform not just our family and personal life, but our involvement in public life as well. It is not straightforward, not least because, in the absence of an accepted authoritative view, the centre of moral and political gravity shifts. Some would argue that, if there is an aggressive secularism, it is matched by an aggressive evangelism.

In the 1960 Presidential campaign in the United States, one of the main obstacles to John F. Kennedy's prospects was his Catholicism. The turning point was when he addressed a group of Protestant ministers and declared his belief in an America "where the separation of Church and State is absolute". "I believe" he said, "in a President whose views on religion are his own private affair, neither imposed on him by the nation or imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding office...I do not speak for my Church on public matters and my Church does not speak for me...If the time should ever come when my office would require me to either violate my conscience, or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office".

Twenty-five years later, when Mario Cuomo was governor of New York State, the argument was less clear cut. In 1984, Cuomo gave a lecture entitled *Religious Belief and Public Morality* in which he said the following: “The Catholic who holds political office in a pluralistic democracy – who is elected to serve Jews and Muslims, atheists, and Protestants as well as Catholics – bears special responsibility. He or she undertakes to help create conditions under which all can live with a maximum degree of dignity and with a reasonable degree of freedom; where everyone who chooses may hold beliefs different from specifically Catholic ones, sometimes contradictory to them; where the laws protect people’s right to divorce, to use birth control and even to choose abortion...The Catholic public official lives the political truth... that to assure our freedom we must allow others the same freedom. Even if occasionally it produces conduct by them which, for us, would be sinful...We know that the price of seeking to force our beliefs on others is that they might some day force theirs on us”.

Cuomo went on to argue: “My Church and my conscience require me to believe certain things about divorce, birth control and abortion. My Church does not order me, under pain of sin or expulsion, to pursue my salvific mission according to a precisely defined political plan.”

That argument is no longer universally accepted. Politicians in the United States are required to take a stance on, for example, abortion which demands that they translate personal belief into public action. John Kerry was condemned by a number of Catholic bishops in the United States during the last Presidential election because they believed he had not carried Catholic teaching on abortion into the Senate when it came to the adoption of law. They said he should be denied Holy Communion. In other words, whatever the virtue of his private conduct, he was answerable in absolute moral terms for the positions he took as a public official.

Cuomo’s own conclusion was this: “Unless we set an example that is clear and compelling, then we will never be able to convince this Society to change the civil laws to protect what we preach is precious human life. Better than any law or rule or threat of punishment would be the moving strength of our own good example...”

Personally, I find Cuomo’s argument compelling. Of course we take our faith into the sphere of decision making whether personal, in our families or in public life. But, for example, while I believe that abortion is almost always wrong, and my Church has every right to preach that it is wrong, I also respect the lawmaker who recognises that the law on abortion exists. If that person concludes that he or she should use their vote in Parliament to secure change in the direction of saving life rather than vote only for absolute abolition then I believe that moral judgement should be respected. Just as I respect the judgement of the social worker in Soweto who advises a prostitute to insist on the use of condoms.

Does the vote in the European Parliament against Mr Buttiglione mean that he, as a Catholic, could not be expected, and therefore could not be trusted, to implement a liberal civil law on the civil rights of homosexuals? The fact that the question is asked, and is asked about Ruth Kelly in this country, illustrates a dilemma for the Catholic Church, but not just for the Catholic Church. For our pluralist society depends upon compromise between our own convictions and the rights of others. Christ enjoined his disciples to teach the Gospel, not to ram it down people’s throats. His own life and death are the absolute manifestation of, living and dying by example. He refused to condemn

Roman taxation, even though it was deemed morally unjust by Jews. He allows his rain to fall equally on the just and the unjust. Unless we can resolve that argument within the Christian community, I doubt whether we shall be able to deal effectively with the dilemmas we face in our multi cultural and multi faith society.

I have inevitably spoken a good deal about the Catholic Church. And I have done so to try to illustrate my argument that, set against the huge moral and social issues which confront us, the issues which we allow to divide us are relatively narrow and often perceived by outsiders as more to do with power politics than truth. The Catholic Church may not think that it is entitled, by its interpretation of Christ's teaching, to ordain women as priests. But should that be an insuperable bar to communion with the Church of England? The Catholic and Anglican churches may not agree on the issue of trans substantiation but what happens at the moment of consecration is in the mind and the power of God and would it not be enough for us to approach the Sacrament with humility and trust and leave the rest to God? I do not think Christ, at the Last Supper, spent time explaining to his disciples what he meant by his words. Nor did they ask. They accepted his words and actions because they believed in his authority and love.

All this is relevant because the secular world and the world of Faith have to live alongside each other. In his article in *The Times* on his return from China, Archbishop Rowan Williams wrote: "The proverbial visitor from Mars might have imagined that the greatest immediate threat to British society was religious war, fomented by faith schools, cheered on my thousands of veiled women and the Bishops benches in the House of Lords". He went on to argue that a wholly secular society, such as the one the Chinese have sought to create, is a dangerous society because it implies that, as he put it "what comes first in society is the central political licensing authority which has all the resource it needs to create a workable public morality".

How do we manage these issues so that there is not a divide between secular society; those who believe but do not necessarily follow a strictly doctrinal path and those who do believe that they have a monopoly of Truth and that only their interpretation of God's will is the correct one?

The American senator, Barack Obama, in his book *The Audacity of Hope*, makes the point that a secular society and a tolerant society are not necessarily the same thing. Rowan Williams was making the same point in the article I mentioned. For a secular society can, in practice, be a rather intolerant one. Intolerant of that which does not conform to the majority view. Because society, rightly, seeks to protect the civil and human rights of all its citizens, more and more countries, rightly, recognise civil partnerships between same-sex couples. Is it the necessary reverse of the medal that someone like Buttiglione should be prevented from taking up the job for which he was a candidate because, according to his creed, certain acts are sinful?

As I implied earlier, maybe Buttiglione is not the ideal example because another politician could probably have expressed his own view without causing offence. We cannot afford a pitched battle people of faith on the one hand and secular society on the other. How do we, as Christians speak in a way which is true to the Gospels but respects the society in which we live and the fact that people expect to apply their own intelligence and conscience to the moral issues which confront them? The Church can take a stand against a dominant secularism by offering an alternative rooted in the Gospels. But to be heard is not the same as to be heeded. It is relatively easy to be

heard. The bishops who threatened John Kerry with the ultimate un-Christian act were heard. But I would argue that we will be heeded more if we are clear in our views but persuasive rather than dogmatic in our efforts to convince others.

In our own country, the leaders of the Christian communities have not allowed doctrinal differences to get in the way of positive cooperation either among themselves or with leaders of other faiths. But has enough been done through the various mechanisms of ecumenism to try to resolve our remaining differences? For my own Church to claim that the ordination of women in the Church of England has put a stop to progress is to beg the question whether the Catholic approach is right and whether this is a fundamental issue of faith as opposed to policy.

We have every right to our faith schools but would it not make sense to think in terms of Christian faith schools rather than purely one-denominational ones? Then we might not, collectively, feel the pressure on places which makes us oppose reserving twenty five percent of places for people of non Christian faiths – or none? My son went to a Church of England secondary school. He was encouraged to go to Mass on Sunday. Apart from that, he received a Christian education which was as good as we as his parents could have asked for.

My predecessor as Public Affairs adviser to the Catholic Cardinal is now doing a similar job for Rowan Williams. That says a lot that is wholly positive about all three men involved. But it often struck me in my year working for the Cardinal that the resources of the Church of England and the Catholic Church in England and Wales are stretched very thin when it comes to dealing with public issues on which we frequently share a view? Could we not pool those resources rather than maintain our separate bureaucracies?

These are not just practicalities. If we are to encourage genuine integration in our own country, we have to set an example. Why should a Moslem leader pay too much attention to what we say about integration when, in Belfast, 97% of public housing remains segregated along sectarian lines?

The nature of our own society and the reasons why so many young people are attracted by fundamentalist violence are hugely complex. If only, as the head of MI5 put it the other day, it was all like *Spooks* where everything is knowable and solvable by about six people. One thing is for sure and that is that faith is a much more crucial aspect of identity for our fellow Moslem citizens than it is for the rest of us. That was one of the findings of a Home Office survey a year or two back. So working as Christians on our own common identity is a responsibility we can no longer shrug off.

Our Christian faith gives us one practical advantage in dealing with the issues of integration. And that is the significant number of Christians among recent immigrants. In the Catholic Diocese of Westminster (some 200 parishes in London north of the river) Mass attendance has remained constant over the last two decades, whereas it has declined by up to two thirds in other parts of the country. This is down to immigration from Nigeria, Ghana, Philippines, Poland, Thailand, Brazil and so on. Cardinal Murphy O'Connor is the son of Irish immigrant parents. One day before too long the Archbishop of Westminster will probably be drawn from one of these immigrant communities.

One of the main French Catholic churches in London used to have as its congregation wealthy French business people living in London. It still does. But about

fifty percent of its congregation is now poor immigrant families from French speaking Africa. And, happily, the prosperous half have befriended and helped the disadvantaged. That is not an experience or opportunity available to many in secular society.

Archbishop Rowan Williams argued powerfully that, in a society without visible public signs of religion, by which he meant crosses, veils etc, as well as the manifestation of faith in public life and advocacy, we cede to the central authorities of the State the right to determine public morality – as China has done, and failed.

That seems to me to be the challenge to the Church in the States we are in: to be strong in our advocacy but a strength rooted in the humility to know that we do not have a monopoly of wisdom or righteousness and that we have a huge task to undertake to put our own houses, which should be one House, in order.

There is a Catholic hymn which we used to sing with vigour when I was young. If I quote you one line, you will get the drift: “Faith of our fathers, Mary’s prayers, shall win our country back to thee”. It is deeply politically incorrect and it is years since I have heard it sung. But its last verse is interesting: “Faith of our fathers, we will love both friend and foe in all our strife, and preach thee too, as love knows how, by kindly words and virtuous life”.

And there I was going to end. But in looking up St. Cedd I found this thought about him: “St Cedd was trained by a saint and he himself trained others to holiness. A good teacher teaches mostly by what he is and, if he is a good teacher, the things that are important to him become important to those he teaches. Good teachers fashion the souls of others by contact with their own soul.”

I would guess, in the States we are in, that we could all say “Amen” to that.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS – 2nd Keene Lecture 2006
STEPHEN WALL

Do you share the fear that religiously motivated terrorist acts will continue to threaten our society for a generation, and how might we counter this predicament?

Well, I think one has to share the fear. How far are they religiously motivated, as opposed to conducted under a kind of flag, if you like, of religion? You could argue that terrorism in Northern Ireland was religiously motivated, whereas I tend to think that the religious labels were a kind of tribal identification, if you like.

Something like 75% of the Muslim population in this country live in deprived areas – not all, but a very great deal do. If you look at those videos made by the people who perpetrated the bombings last July, you get a sense of a huge amount of anger and frustration and outrage: outrage that is, I think, largely centred on the injustice meted out to the Palestinians in the Middle East. If you look at Northern Ireland (although it isn't an exact parallel), one of the reasons why it's been possible to make progress is because (a) the IRA realised that they couldn't win a victory by force, but also (b) because the roots of the grievance which enabled the IRA to get support from the local community were dealt with. The issues which the minority of Northern Ireland rightly felt had been neglected for years were dealt with.

Unless we are serious about really addressing the issue of the Middle East peace process, and that means devoting ourselves in Europe, plus leadership from the United States, then those who seek to justify terrorism under an Islamic banner will have that grievance to draw on. And I think that things like the situation in Iraq, or like the situation in Lebanon where we appeared to condone day after day of indiscriminate bombing, add fuel to the fire. So I think we might well have this problem for a generation, and there are obviously some people who from an extreme point of view are fomenting a particular view of Islam; but as I say, I don't think those people could succeed unless there was a particular grievance at the root of it.

Please elaborate the causes of the rise in fundamentalism, both Christian and Muslim, and the future direction in Europe.

Well, on the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, I hope I've given what I see as part of the answer. I think it's more difficult to analyse precisely the origins of, as it were, the success of Christian fundamentalism. There is a climate of American politics, self-evidently, after all the United States society was built upon large immigration of people who fled from Europe to escape religious persecution; therefore faith, in American society, is very strong, with nearly 60% of American people going to church every Sunday.

Within that society, the decision of a few on the religious right, taken back in the 1970s, to 'organise for political purposes' was relatively understandable, given their chances of success. American politics democratises down to a very low level, in the sense that elections are to everything from the school board upwards. You can very readily influence your congressman and - if you can organise sufficiently - get your

congressman or congresswoman out of office. Many people when they run for congress, disguise the party banner under which they stand because what they're addressing is popular issues rather than running on a party platform. So I think that for all those reasons it was easier for that kind of movement to gain ground. I think we may in the election last week have seen a bit of a counter-reaction. I don't myself see it being a factor in this country to the same extent, partly for the reasons I've tried to give.

If Turkey is admitted to the European Union, will the balance of religion in Europe be dislodged?

Well, it will be dislodged in the sense that we do have a largely secular Europe and we will have, if Turkey joins, a country with a majority Muslim population. I think there's a degree of dishonesty in some of the argument that's made on this by some leaders in Europe, when they shelter behind a sort of flag of Christian identity.

We made a promise to Turkey - back in the 1960s when we first made an Association Agreement - that if in due course they fulfilled the conditions of membership, which are laid down and really amount to democratic standards as well as economic freedoms, then they would be entitled to apply for membership and to negotiate for membership. So we have no basis in terms of the commitment we made to turn round now that the Turks are within spitting distance of that, and say, 'Well, sorry, guys, we didn't really mean it, that you could join the European Union'. That said, they have to fulfil the conditions and as the President of Commission said on television when he was over here a couple of weeks ago, we're probably talking about 20 years - 10 years to negotiate and 10 years of transition - before they are full members. Some of what we are seeing at the moment in terms of disillusionment in Turkey with the application to join the European Union is, I think, a product of the hostility that they find in the European Union itself.

I think if we look at our interests and the world, it seems to me that the greatest thing that Europe has done for peace in the world is to extend democracy beyond the original six to 21 other countries. The countries of Eastern and Central Europe would not necessarily (almost certainly not) have been stable, peaceful democracies without the prospect of membership of the European Union. People of Slovakia, even as recently as ten years ago, had a really nasty president in Vladimir Meciar, and would have voted for him again had it not been for the European Union effectively saying to them, 'Well, you can either choose the European Union or you can choose President Meciar'.

Now, if Turkey is to join the European Union, she will have to make even more significant changes. I think a Turkey which is a country of majority Muslim faith, but as a democracy and part of the European Union, actually strengthens us and I think strengthens the prospects of democracy spreading elsewhere in the Middle East. There is a far better hope of democracy spreading in this way than by trying to do it at the end of the barrel of a gun, which I think we've seen is just not possible. You can take over a country, but you can't actually change the way people behave for the better by doing that.

How can Orthodoxy [Orthodox Christianity] be given a chance to contribute its wisdom to modern Europe?

It's an interesting point. I think that with the enlargement of the European Union, with Greece as a member for two decades, and Cyprus, there is obviously a greater opportunity for it to happen, but I think there is a lesson actually for the Anglican Church, the Christian churches.

The role that Orthodoxy may play depends hugely on what happens in the Balkans over the next few years. On the back of the events of the 1990s, we are slowly moving towards the situation where, with the prospect of EU membership, the countries in the Balkans are ironing out their differences and at least being compelled to come to terms with each other; because otherwise the prospect of membership recedes. There are clearly differences in terms of the Orthodox view versus the view of the rest of the Christian European world that have to be reconciled. But, as churches, there seems to be a world of difference between our seeking to force a view that we hold on others (which I wouldn't support) and being reticent about putting a view forward. I think it is open to the churches to put a view powerfully in the political market place - the more united we can be, as on many issues, the better. But it seems to me that advocacy should mean taking our place in the public market place and winning by the strength of our argument, rather than sitting back and simply relying on the fact that we once had, in the public sphere, an authority which is perhaps now denied us.

Are we then as Christians to witness to our faith in our approach to public issues, without being under threat from lions, but then to accept virtuously that the secular world will win?

Well, I don't think the secular world will necessarily win. None of us knows, but I think we can't win if we simply say, 'We have a monopoly of truth, this is right, this is wrong', and refuse to engage in the argument.

The whole issue of assisted dying, euthanasia and so on, is a very current issue in our society. The churches have a view, which seems to me to be a cogent view, based both on a moral view of the dignity of life and the sacred nature of life. It's also a view based on what is in the interests of human beings, regardless of the sacred nature in terms of the immortality of the human soul. I think that by making that argument, in a powerful way but not a confrontational way, we have actually been very persuasive.

The Anglican bishops and some of the Catholic peers in the House of Lords and others, have made those arguments. Insofar as they've won those arguments, they've done it partly by political pressure, but more importantly, by persuading their fellows and the public that actually the arguments that we had to make were the right arguments.

Now, we won't always win. We have to accept that the days are gone when 'church' – and this certainly applies to the Catholic Church in spades – when the Pope can speak *ex cathedra* and all Catholics say 'Yes, that's it'. We all now apply our minds to it, and decide whether we do or don't agree with particular pronouncements. I don't think that change, as it were, in the way we have to behave is to be feared. But if we don't do it, people think, 'Well, that argument's rubbish; we're not going to accept it', and they just walk away. So I think it is in our own interest to engage in that way, and as I say, I think the argument over assisted dying showed that when we do, we can succeed.