

An Insiders View of the EU from a Christian Perspective *by Louise S. D. Purvis*

My husband John, an MEP for 15 years, and I are dedicated to Remain in the EU Referendum. However, as committed Christians, our prayers have to be above all "God's will be done". I dare to pray this prayer after lengthy research. I asked myself "Why do I believe the EU falls in line with biblical principles" and Christ's own teaching?

This is my Christian perspective after 40 years involvement in the EU. Since its inception, the EU has been based on the three major aims: - peace and reconciliation; democracy; prosperity.

My husband John was elected to the first directly elected EU Parliament in 1979. During the first EU Parliamentary session, it was amazing to see all the countries that had fought each other for so long, sitting together in the same parliament. It was reconciliation at its best. An example of this was in their first vote to elect a President of the Parliament. The MEPs chose a Jewish French woman, Madame Simone Veil, who still had the tattoo of a concentration camp on her wrist. I marvelled at her forgiving attitude and ability to reconcile with MEPs whose countries had been responsible for the death of many members of her family.

Most of the MEPs from these previously warring countries are truly "ambassadors of reconciliation", as we are called to be in Corinthians. This is why Winston Churchill said it was "better to jaw-jaw than war-war" and why Lady Shirley Williams calls the EU the greatest experiment in peace the world has ever known. It is also why the EU won the Nobel Peace Prize some years back.

Another example of peace and reconciliation was that we would sometimes see Ian Paisley, John Hume, John Taylor and other so-called "enemies" having lunch together in the Parliament, when they wouldn't dare be seen together in Northern Ireland. George Mitchell, the American Peace envoy from the U.S openly credited the European Parliament with helping to bring about peace in Northern Ireland.

Since its inception, the EU literally has been "turning swords into plough shares". Nato has made our enemies **fear** war. The EU has given causes to **keep the peace**. "Blessed be the peacemakers" comes to mind.

Amazing as it was, to bring old enemies from World Wars I and II into the EU, it was equally amazing to have former Warsaw Pact countries added to the EU in 2004. Speaking to these new MEPs, formerly under the yoke of Communism, I was told that they never imagined being in the European Parliament in their lifetime. They were thrilled.

The EU is firmly founded on Democracy. The MEPs are directly elected. The Council of Ministers are also directly elected representatives of their countries. The Commission members, the EU's civil service, are appointed by their directly elected Presidents or Prime Ministers. Most of them have held high Cabinet positions in their countries. The U.S. and Britain also have an unelected civil service.

Many countries that have joined the EU have been brought into democracy. Greece was under "the Colonels", Franco was ruling Spain, Salazar was ruling Portugal, the Warsaw Pact countries were under Communism. In spite of their recent troubles all of these countries are democracies now.

Although there are some ex-presidents, prime ministers, mayors and former cabinet ministers in the EU Parliament, there is a lower number of "career politicians". They are joined by doctors, lawyers, businessmen. Then there are singers like Nana Miskouri and Dana, Olympic champions, the world No 1 rally driver, and an actor from Eastenders! This gives the EU Parliament a wider spread of expertise. I'm no woman's libber but I am impressed that in the EU Parliament, there is also a much higher percentage of women, making it even more democratically representative.

Prosperity is also one of Europe's main aims. Many of the poorer countries in the South of Europe and others like Ireland and all the Eastern European countries have risen to greater prosperity in the EU. Wasn't it right to give these countries a leg-up? What would Jesus say? Perhaps – "carry one another's burdens, for in this you fulfil the law of Christ" as Galatians, tell us".

The European Union aims for prosperity, based on the "free market". When I read History at University, a common thread seemed to be that free markets led to good relations with other countries. Protectionism seemed always to lead to poor relations with them, and then often to nationalism, adventurism, invasion of other countries and sometimes even to war.

President Putin will be the real winner over the weakening or breakup of the EU. The EU, along with NATO, are the only obstacles in his plans to invade and take over old parts of the U.S.S.R. and possibly other countries in the future. MEPs from Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania are worried just now, but feel safer in the EU.

If the UK leaves the EU free market one wonders "why would any large business want to invest or be based in a country with a market of 60 million, when they could be based in a market of 500 million?" It wouldn't make sense, and it is good that under recent negotiations with the EU, we don't ever have to join the Euro. It is amazing to me that the other 27 nations in Europe have granted "special status" to the UK for the future. It shows, I think, how much those 27 want us to remain part of the EU.

We in Scotland have an extra decision to make. If we vote to leave the EU, we may also have another Scottish referendum to leave the U.K. So we, in Scotland could end up out of the EU and out of the UK! Small is not beautiful with President Putin on the move, our economy at risk, and the refugee crisis to be solved – and all this for the sake of so-called "sovereignty"!

I've tried to show that in spite of the EU's imperfections, its basic premises – peace and reconciliation, democracy and prosperity – are "true, honourable, right and of good report", and therefore what I want for the future of our children and grandchildren.

For my husband, going to Europe was a calling to maintain the peace that his father fought so hard to win, and it was also to become a ministry. One of his first acts on being elected in 1979 was to start an all-party prayer group in the European Parliament, still going strong to this day. This fed into a European Prayer Breakfast, reaching the leadership of the 28 EU countries and other European nations, ^{and} including Russia. These groups will have a big influence in the future direction of Europe. I pray the UK will be part of this influence for good.

I will be praying as I know you will pray as you vote. "What would Jesus do?" and "God's will be done"