<div align="center">The EU and Me</div>

How are you going to vote in the referendum on June 23<sup>rd</sup>? I hope you will vote. We have been entrusted with this tremendous responsibility, to share in a decision which is not important for our own country alone, but also for the whole of Europe and which will have a major impact on much of the rest of the world. I hope you will not shirk your own part in making this decision.

I think we should hope for a decisive result, with one side or the other gaining a big enough majority to settle the issue for at least a generation. Whatever the result, all of us, however we voted, must afterwards live together in harmony and work with the decision the majority has taken democratically.

I'll try to put the case fairly for both sides, but I had better start by declaring my own personal inclinations. I'm a strong advocate of freedom and independence, of individual rights and responsibilities. Personally, I dislike the idea of my country being dictated to by Brussels bureaucrats as much as I dislike Medway Council bureaucrats dictating to me how I should live my own life. I voted to leave in 1975. Was, I wonder, joining the Common Market the worst disaster to befall the English people since 1066? Given that the contagion of overregulation seems to have originated in Brussels, I'm rather hoping that, if we do leave the EU, we can elect a British government which will also curtail the powers of local authorities considerably and curb the nanny state!

My admittedly limited knowledge of history suggests to me that the two periods in which this country really flourished were the Tudor and Victorian eras, when we disengaged somewhat from Europe and reached out to the rest of the world. In the Middle Ages, we had squandered a good deal of blood and treasure fighting European wars and inflicted much suffering on the people of France. The decline of the British Empire, on which the sun allegedly never set, was certainly accelerated, if not caused, by our entanglement in the Great War of 1914. It is always dangerous to second guess history, to speculate on *what if*?, but without the involvement of the British Empire, many scholars believe that the Great War would have remained confined to Europe (instead of becoming a world war) and that Germany would have fairly swiftly defeated France as she did in 1871 and 1940. Historians differ on what would have followed from that. Some suggest that the Kaiser's government would have established something like the EU (only excluding Britain and her empire, of course). In that case, there would have been no rise of the Nazis dedicated to avenging the defeat of 1918 with such terrible consequences for Europe and the rest of the world in the ensuing decades. Others think that the Kaiser was actually not much better than Hitler, that his government would not have been much less oppressive and expansionist than the Nazis were and that ultimately we would have been unable to avoid war with Germany or even with the whole of a German dominated Europe. If the British Empire had not been weakened by two world wars which started in Europe, on the other hand, would it have evolved into a commonwealth of democracies under the law, or would we have continued to use our superior military and naval strength to dominate and exploit one fifth of the world's population? Another unanswerable question.

Now, I'll try to recast those two last paragraphs from the opposite point of view. Freedom, independence and individualism are highly desirable, but *no man is an island entire unto himself.* We need one another. We live in communities, societies, nations, the world. We can't thrive without other people. But, in order to live with other people, we have to forego some of our freedom and independence. We have laws and conventions and treaties. I can't do just as I like here in the Rectory without caring about the consequences for my neighbours. Neither can the United Kingdom exist as if we were the only country on earth. We need to make agreements with one another, to enter into treaties, to trade, to recognise national and international law. We can't live without other people. So we have to accommodate our personal freedoms so as not to impinge on their rights. We give up a certain amount of control over our own lives in order to experience the blessings of sharing our lives with other people. Marriage is the best example of this at the level of individuals. Each gives self to the other and the two become one for better or worse unconditionally for the rest of their lives. We have many other family relationships of varying degrees of closeness and relationships with friends, neighbours and colleagues. Similarly, as a nation, we have all sorts of ties – not only the EU, but the UN, NATO, the Commonwealth, etc..

We can, however, choose our friends. We might want to associate with the Commonwealth or with the English-speaking world or with the United Nations or the World Trade Organisation as much as or more

than we want to associate with the EU. We can also choose how close a relationship we want with our friends. Do we want to live in the same house with them and share their rules or do we want to preserve our independence and opt in to as much or as little of their programme as we feel comfortable with? If they only want our friendship on their terms, do we still want to be friends with them? Or would we be happier as Billy No Mates?

Would there have been another European War (leading to a Third World War) if the dominant European powers of Germany and France hadn't tied themselves into what became the European Union? Another imponderable, but the western world was sick of war by 1945. Moreover the threat posed by Soviet Russia more or less compelled the western powers to stick together and to form NATO. Whatever might have been the case five or six decades ago, I find it very hard to believe that modern Germany would march into Poland tomorrow if Britain left the EU.

So, there remains a case to be made on either side. The main issues are apparently constitutional, economic, security, immigration and national identity.

The EU is not really a democratic organisation. The European Parliament has very little effective power. The unelected European Commission has a great deal of power and so does the European Court. Neither is in any sense democratic. The Council of Ministers is democracy at second or third hand. We get to vote for members of parliament. They support a government. The government appoints ministers to attend the Council of ministers. The EU is also becoming even less democratic as the elite in charge overrule national democracies in order to impose what they believe to be the best solutions to the immigration crisis and the economic collapse of some Eurozone countries.

If we value democracy, do we think a more democratic EU is the answer, with more powers for the European Parliament? Are we prepared to give up that much national sovereignty? Wouldn't it be too big and too diverse ever to deal with important and urgent problems? Or would we like to bring sovereignty back to our national parliament? Do we think our laws should only be made by people we vote for directly? If so, the EU in its present form is not viable. If we believe in sharing sovereignty at a level higher than the nation state, why stop at Europe? Why not aim for closer ties with all the western powers, or with the Commonwealth? Is the eventual aim a world government and a world parliament? On the other hand, if we are worried about our individuality and our own culture being subsumed in enormous international organisations, how small should the nation state be? Should England, Wales and Scotland separate? If they did, what of Northern Ireland? Should we turn back the clock, not 44 years to before we joined the EU or 309 years to before we became one with Scotland, but 1500 years to when Kent itself was an independent kingdom?

Knowledgeable people come down on both sides of the economic argument. Some of them say that we should lose our access to European markets and become poorer if we left the EU. Others say that the EU would have to continue to trade with us on good terms, because it is as much in their interest as ours. To do otherwise would be cutting off their noses to spite their faces. We should have less regulation outside the EU. Our businesses would not be tangled up in red tape. We should be able to trade more freely with the rest of the world, much of which is doing far better economically than the sclerotic EU. Some people, however, worry that a British government too close to the City of London and the boardrooms of multimillion pound corporations would scrap not only unnecessary regulation, but also the rules we need to maintain the health and safety of workers and consumers and to protect them from exploitation.

There is also the fear that the EU leadership would do its best to make it difficult for Britain to thrive outside Europe for fear that the populations of other EU countries might think about leaving themselves. Actually, this is one of my problems about the EU. The people in favour of it form an elite who regard the rest of us as stupid peasants who can't be trusted with a say in the decision-making process. Europhiles at home and in Europe are quite angry that David Cameron has given the British people a choice and they are quite determined that the ordinary people in other countries should not be allowed their own say as to whether or not they wish to remain part of an ever closer union.

The security argument is closely parallel to the economic argument.  Are we better off making our own decisions about issues such as border control, data sharing, extradition and military interventions or pooling these decisions in a greater whole? The greater whole could be more effective. On the other hand, we could find ourselves outvoted and compelled to adopt policies which we regarded as not in our own best interests. Law-abiding democracies will, I am sure however, continue to cooperate in the fight against terrorism and other serious crime whether they are inside or outside the EU.

Immigration is the issue that makes me worry about the out campaign.  Some of those most strenuously advocating that we leave the EU are very anti-immigrant.  Christians cannot be anti any human beings. Whatever immigration policy we adopt, we absolutely have to treat immigrants and would be immigrants with respect.  There are good reasons for immigration.  We live in one of the best countries in the world and it is not surprising that many people want to come here to escape war or persecution or poverty.  We benefit too by immigrants coming here, bringing their skills and willingness to work, often in jobs for which there are too few British people willing or suitably qualified to fill vacancies.  We also benefit by meeting and engaging with people from different cultures.  There are also reasons for worrying about immigration: too much pressure on jobs, housing and public services.  We are a crowded country with a tenth of this green and pleasant land already having disappeared under tarmac and concrete.  Natives may feel that their own culture is being dissolved in a sea of diversity.  Immigrants may continue to regard as "home" the places their families came from rather than where they now live.  This may present a problem when there is conflict between this country and the country or culture from which the immigrants came.  Nobody says that we should turn away all would be immigrants.  Hardly anybody says that we should welcome all those who want to come.  There is no moral reason why immigrants from Europe should be treated differently from the way we treat immigrants from the rest of the world.  The questions are whom should we welcome to live here and who should decide who is welcome? We may feel that the best way to deal with the huge numbers of migrants is to agree a common strategy across the whole European continent.  We may, on the other hand, believe that we should retain control of our own borders.

Finally, the question of identity and our place in the world.  You may think of yourself as English, British or European or all three.  Maybe you think of yourself as a citizen of the world.  Ask me my race and I shall say "human".  Ask me my ethnicity and, if I answer at all, I shall say "white English", the category which was tellingly left off the 2001 census.  Much more significantly than any secular categorisations of nationality or ethnicity,  I belong to *a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues* -  the Church of God.  Christian is my essential identity.

Where does the EU fit in? Is it a step towards a universal brotherhood of nations or is a private club for rich western nations, protecting themselves against the rest of the word with tariffs and trade barriers? The controversy about whether or not to invite Turkey to join is evidence that this question is far from settled.  If we're aiming for universal brotherhood, we do everything we can to make it possible for Turkey to join.  If the EU is a club of like-minded, post-Christian western nations, we make it as awkward as possible for them to join.

Like-minded western nations.  Is Britain really naturally part of Europe or was General de Gaulle right that we don't properly belong? Most of continental Europe has experienced life under the tyrannies of Napoleon, Hitler and/or Stalin. (We played a big part in rescuing them!) It goes back far further than that, however.  In its declining centuries, the Roman Empire became very bureaucratic, controlling and paternalistic, even more so in the Byzantine east than in the west.  The Holy Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the Napoleonic Code, Soviet Socialism and National Socialism all took up the same mantle.  The people in charge know best.  It is therefore in the interests of ordinary people to have their lives run for them by the Church or by the government as the case may be.  Everything is regulated.  What isn't explicitly permitted is forbidden.  The authorities are effectively above the law (opening the path to corruption and tyranny).  Democracy and free speech are in the gift of the elite and can be withheld or withdrawn if the elite deem it necessary. (In contrast, democracy and free speech are actually written into the constitution of the USA, inalienable rights which neither the president, nor congress nor the courts can take away.)  There are so many rules under the European/Soviet set up that nobody expects them all to be obeyed as you will have observed on trips to Europe, where health and safety etc. are commonly flouted.

As an island on the edge of the continent, we have developed differently. It is our unelected head of state who has little real power. Ditto the Church of England. We would find it inconceivable that parliament wasn't sovereign. Her majesty's government is subject to the same laws as the rest of us. We have Common Law and Magna Carta and the 1689 Bill of Rights. We are a free people under the Law. Democracy and freedom of speech are basic to our national character. We are free to do anything which is not specifically prohibited by law. The laws we do have are enforced without fear or favour. These freedoms have been compromised and eroded by our membership of the EU, but it is still true to say that our political and legal systems have much more in common with the USA and many commonwealth countries than they do with most of Europe.

Then there are language and culture. While the EU spends huge sums of money and a great deal of effort translating documents into the official languages of Europe, most of the world has simply adopted English as its *lingua franca*. Partly for this reason, the culture of the world's only remaining superpower, the USA, easily dominates everything from films to fast food throughout the world. Continental Europe is bit of a backwater! You might do better to learn mandarin than French.

If you wanted to be a cosmopolitan Englishman in the 1950s, when the EEC came into existence, you travelled and did business in Europe. Sixty years later, it is as easy to get to the USA or Australia as it was to go to France or Austria in those dear dead days almost beyond recall and the internet gives us instant communication everywhere.

Some people think of leaving the EU mainly in terms of securing Britain against what they don't like from beyond these shores. Others think of Brexit as potentially setting us free from an outdated, overregulated, elite club so that we can engage much more openly with the rest of the world. Possibly they are both right; perhaps neither is and we need to be part of Europe both for our own security and in order to take our full part in the global economy.

So, is the EU the future, a step on the road to global integration, or is it the past, a failed fifties attempt to create a super state on the model of what the Americans had done nearly two centuries previously in quite different circumstances? Some people think that the EU wouldn't long survive the departure of its second biggest net contributor and if Brexit set a precedent for other disaffected populations. That is for the peoples of Europe to decide (not just the elite, I hope). Do we want to continue to throw our lot in with them, to put most of our eggs in the European basket? Or do we think we would be better going it alone, relating to other nations on our own terms? Apparently, we get to decide. Don't forget to vote on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. Roger.