

An illustration of the dilemma facing Christians in our society was given by Cardinal Brady of Armagh:

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Cardinal Brady— "Successive EU Decisions Have Undermined the Family Based on Marriage, and the Right to Life from the Moment of Conception to Natural Death"

Growing unease among Christians at the direction in which the EU is headed may have been a factor in the recent rejection of the Lisbon Treaty by Irish voters, the Catholic primate, Ireland's Cardinal Seán Brady, has said.

Speaking at the Humbert Summer School in Co Mayo, the cardinal said the "prevailing culture and social agenda" within the EU appeared to be driven by the secular tradition "rather than by the Christian memory and heritage of the vast majority of member states".

The Catholic Church, he said, was "generally positive towards the European project and its founding ideals", but this was "a qualified support". "As the recent referendum on the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland suggests, at least some of those who were previously enthusiastic about the founding aims of the EU, both social and economic, are now expressing unease," he said.

The cardinal made his comments while delivering the Bishop Stock address in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral in Killala, the keynote event of the Humbert school, which concluded yesterday. He spoke of "a fairly widespread culture in European affairs which relegates manifestations of one's own religious convictions to the private and subjective sphere".

To ignore "this trend within the EU and its impact on people of faith has inevitable political and social consequences, not least on levels of support for the project itself", he said.

It was "why it may be important for the EU to look again at a prevailing pragmatic attitude that compromises on essential human, moral and social values on the basis of the lowest common denominator", he said.

"The experience of many Christians within the EU is that this lowest common denominator invariably coincides with the secular and relativist tradition within Europe - that which denies moral absolutes with an objective basis - rather than the religious view."

Such an approach ended up with Christians "being denied the right to intervene in public debates or at least having their contribution dismissed as an attempt to protect unjustified privileges, such as, for example, the right to employ people who support the ethos of a Christian institution".

The cardinal said one reason influencing some Christians' view of the European project may be what Pope John Paul II described as the "loss of Christian memory" in European institutions and policy.

"Successive decisions which have undermined the family based on marriage, the right to life from the moment of conception to natural death, the sacredness of the Sabbath, the right of Christian institutions to maintain and promote their ethos, including schools - these and other decisions have made it more difficult for committed Christians to maintain their instinctive commitment to the European project," he said.

He contrasted the situation in Europe with that in the US, "a culture which prides itself on the separation of church and state and on its diversity". He was "intrigued to discover last weekend that it was quite natural to expect the US presidential candidates to answer direct questions about their commitment to faith, their willingness to support faith-based organisations, their position on moral issues and how it would affect their appointment of public officials". He looked forward "to the day we have the same level of openness and choice in our own elections here in Ireland and in Europe".

"Without respect for its Christian memory and soul, I believe it is possible to anticipate continuing difficulties for the European project. These will emerge not only in economic terms but in terms of social cohesion and the continued growth of a dangerous individualism that does not care about God or about what the future might have in store."