The Thirty-sixth

ERIC SYMES ABBOTT

Memorial Lecture

"PEACE ONLY COMES AT EXTREME COST": EUROPE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

delivered by

Lord Adonis (Andrew Adonis)
Chair of European Movement UK

at Westminster Abbey
on Thursday 12 May 2022

and

at Keble College, Oxford
on Friday 13 May 2022

The Very Revd Eric Symes Abbott

(1906 – 1983)

The Eric Symes Abbott Memorial Fund was endowed by friends of Eric Abbott to provide for an annual lecture or course of lectures on spirituality and pastoralia in his memory. The lecture is usually given in May on consecutive evenings in London and Oxford; due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, there was no lecture in 2020.

The members of the Committee are:
the Dean of King's College London (Chair);
the Dean of Westminster; the Warden of Keble College, Oxford;
the Reverend John Robson LVO; The Reverend Dr James Hawkey;
the Right Reverend the Lord Harries of Pentregarth FKC;
and the Revd Anthony Buckley.

This Lecture is the thirty-sixth in the series, and details of previous lectures may be found overleaf. The text of most of these lectures can be downloaded for free from the website of the Dean's Office at King's College London (https://www.kcl.ac.uk/dean/eric-symes-abbott-memorial-lecture-archive); if you are unable to download the text, please contact the office to be sent a hard copy. Audio recordings of the lectures since 2014 are also available on the same website.

Previous Lectures in the Series:

2006   XXI. The Very Revd Vivienne Faull, Dean of Leicester: *"A New Song in a Strange Land: the contribution of women to the priestly ministry of the Church"*

2007   XXII. The Revd Dr Richard A. Burridge, Dean of King's College London: *"Being Biblical? Slavery, Sexuality, and the Inclusive Community"*

2008   XXIII. The Revd Canon Dr Jane Shaw, University of Oxford: *"The Mystical Turn: Religious Experience in the Modern World"*

2009   XXIV. The Revd Professor Alister McGrath, King's College London: *"Religious and Scientific Faith: The Case of Charles Darwin's* Origin of Species*"*

2010   XXV: The Rt Revd the Lord Harries of Pentregarth, former Bishop of Oxford: *"The End of the Permissive Society? Towards a Christian Understanding of the Common Good"*

2011   XXVI: The Rt Revd & Rt Hon Dr Richard Chartres KCVO, Bishop of London: *"The Word in Print: Does the King James Bible have a Future?"*

2012   XXVII: The Rt Revd Dr Peter Selby, formerly Bishop of Worcester & Bishop to HM Prisons: *"Mis-Establishment: Locating, and re-locating, the Church of England"*

2013   XXVIII: Professor Dame Averil Cameron FBA FKC, formerly Warden of Keble College, Oxford: *"Constantine's Vision and the Church Today: From the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (AD312) to the Twenty-First Century"*

2014   XXIX: The Revd Dr Sam Wells, Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields and Visiting Professor in Christian Ethics, King's College London: *"Beyond Justice"*

2015   XXX: The Revd Lucy Winkett, Rector, St James's Church Piccadilly: *"Blessed are the Hypocrites?" Saying sorry in a tell-all age*

2016   XXXI: Sir Roger Scruton, Writer and Philosopher: *"The Sacred, the Profane and the Desecrated"*

2017   XXXII: Salley Vickers, former Psychoanalyst, Literary Critic and Author: "*Faith & Imagination: How the Arts speak to the reality of the Unseen"*

2018   XXXIII: The Revd Richard Coles, Cleric, Broadcaster and former Communard: "*Beating the bounds: Parish Ministry and Spirituality Today"*

2019   XXXIV: Sir James Macmillan, Composer, Conductor, Artistic Director: *"The Most Spiritual of the Arts: Music, Modernity and the Search for the Sacred"*

NO LECTURE IN 2020

2021   XXXV: Loretta Minghella, Master of Clare College, Cambridge: *"Money, Bias, and the Geography of the Heart"*

"PEACE ONLY COMES AT EXTREME COST"
EUROPE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Churchill said of the reconstruction of the chamber of the House of Commons bombed by Hitler's Luftwaffe: 'we shape our institutions and they shape us'. Maybe the only institutions to have shaped us – the English – more than the House of Commons are Westminster Abbey, 'this royal throne of kings,' and the University of Oxford, including Keble College, which is almost exactly midway in the order of creation of its colleges and which, like King's College London, was founded to glorify and advance the Church of England in the Victorian era.

No one understood and worked England's institutions better than Eric Abbott. As well as serving as Dean of this Abbey, Eric Abbott was Warden of Keble College, Dean of King's College London and the first Chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen in 1952. And no one understood more the imperative for institutions to be self-critical. In the fourth of his meditations on the Mystery of the Transfiguration, delivered in this Abbey church in the midst of the bombing and bloodshed of the Second World War, he makes this profound remark: 'The death of our Lord accomplished at Jerusalem means that probably the real enemies are within our gates. We tend to think that the chief sufferings are those inflicted by the world upon the Church. But those sufferings are easy to bear compared the sufferings which we bear as Christians within the Church. These come because the Church is the place where the tensions of life have to be resolved at the deepest level and peace only comes at extreme cost.'

Those words of Eric Abbott – 'peace only comes at extreme cost' – are the text of my lecture. Peace comes at extreme cost not only in the church but in all human enterprises. The enterprise I wish to discuss with you this evening is Europe, where peace has come – and still comes today – at the extreme cost of virtually constant war and civil war since Europe's very inception as a recognisable entity in the Middle Ages. The task of our generation is to forge a new and better peace, and for that we will have to pay an extreme cost not only in averting wars, but in reforming Europe's institutions so that they are fit for promoting peace.

For Europe's wars are not remotely over. In an insight as profound as Eric Abbott's, former Chancellor Angela Merkel used to remark that the Peace of Augsberg, the great treaty of 1555 for perpetual peace across the lands of Germany, Austria and beyond between the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and Schmalkaldic League, and which allowed the princes of Europe to select

either Protestantism or Catholicism as the religion of their domain and granted free emigration of residents who dissented, that this peace came only 64 years before the outbreak of the Thirty Years War, a European civil war as terrible and bloody as the thirty years war of the 20th century between the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 and the conclusion of the second world war after the Holocaust and the almost total destruction of Germany and much of the rest of Europe in 1945. It is a poignant reflection that it was precisely 64 years – the same interval as between the Peace of Augsberg and the 30 Years War – between the inauguration of the European Union in 1958 and the outbreak of the Ukraine war this February. In Ukraine the peace of Europe is vitiated on a scale not seen since 1945, and the horrors of the Thirty Years War and both world wars of the 20th century are being repeated by the latest of our continent's tyrants, Putin, in the siege of Mariupol, the extermination in Bucha, and the whole vicious attack on the democracy of Ukraine by Russia.

Furthermore, like all wars in Europe over ages past, the Ukraine war is in fundamental respects a civil war, between peoples whose bonds are as significant as their differences – two peoples, Russian and Ukrainian, who share not only a largely common history and culture, but also a common Orthodox church, the Russian Orthodox Church, whose spiritual home was in Kiev until the acrimonious split of the Orthodox church in the run-up this war, an event which goes to the heart of Eric Abbott's observation that the church is the place where the tensions of life have to be resolved at the deepest level. Patriarch Kirill's blessing of Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine will go down as one of the darkest chapters in the history Christendom, akin to the third of Lutheran clergy who were members of the Nazi party in 1933 and the dealings of Pope Leo XII with Europe's fascist dictators in the same decade. The Ukraine war is also a civil war in the wider European context if we, as I think we should, regard Russia as a power and a people destined – one day, under enlightened leadership – to take their place among the great peoples, nations and democracies of Europe, to which Russia is not only geographically contiguous but in fundamental ways, social, religious and political, co-sanguineous.

So I take my cue from Eric Abbott this evening. Peace only comes at extreme cost and the institutions of peace need to be built painfully anew in each generation.

In Europe, we have three fundamental institutions of peace – the European Union, the Council of Europe, and NATO – and all three need to be significantly strengthened.

All three of these modern European institutions of peace were established in

the immediate aftermath of the Second World War in a bid to ensure that nothing like it ever happened again. The Council of Europe was established in 1948, its first chairman Winston Churchill, to enshrine the principles of human rights that underpinned the Nuremberg trial of the Nazi regime's leaders, set out thereafter in the European Convention on Human Rights, and given teeth in the establishment as part of the Council of the European Court of Human Rights. I am privileged to be one of the UK's members of the Council of Europe, and it is a sombre reflection on the state of Europe that our principal business in Strasbourg last month was to expel Russia from membership of the Council. 'In the centre of our movement stands the idea of a charter of Human Rights, guarded by freedom and sustained by law,' said Churchill at the first meeting. In today's Russia there is neither freedom nor the rule of law.

The European Union began as a project for Franco-German economic partnership in the European Coal and Steel Community of 1951, expanded into a comprehensive economic partnership between the continent's leading democracies in the Treaty of Rome six years later. With the fall of dictatorships first in southern Europe in the 1970s, then in central and eastern Europe after 1989, the EU expanded to become a confederation of 28 nations – now alas 27 with the departure of Britain – making it a union of free peoples with no parallel in history except the United States of America. For those who mistake its purpose, never forget that Churchill, who called for the establishment of what became the EU in his great Zurich speech of 1946, said the imperative was to build 'a kind of United States of Europe,' and that indeed is what we have done, a project to which Britain must surely return in due course when we come once again to realise, as we did in the generation after the war, that peace indeed only comes at extreme cost, including a necessary cost to prejudices of narrow nationalism, including English nationalism.

The third of the post-war institutions of peace, NATO, is the greatest defensive alliance that the peace-abiding nations of Europe have ever constructed against external aggressors. There was nothing inevitable after 1945 about its bedrock of a defensive military partnership between the United States of America and most of the states of what became the European Union. On the contrary, in 1945 Roosevelt and Truman declared that the US would withdraw all troops from Europe within two years, as it had after 1918. It was the visionary leadership of Britain's post-war foreign secretary Ernest Bevin which persuaded the equally tough-minded US Secretary of State General George Marshall in 1947 that Stalin was in all essentials another Hitler and had to be resisted in the same way if the peace of western Europe was to be preserved. It was this which led to the creation of NATO two years later, in

the aftermath of the successful raising of the siege of Berlin after a year-long airlift, which came perilously close to seeing Stalin colonise the whole of Germany, west as well as east, and from there seek to subjugate most of western Europe, possibly instigating a third world war only three years after the second.

73 years later, NATO has a membership of 30 nations, soon to become 32 as Finland and Sweden join in direct response to Putin's invasion of Ukraine. And whereas the UK has regrettably left the EU, it is a stalwart of NATO, and has played a vital leadership role in bolstering Ukraine's defence against Putin's invasion. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty – that an attack on one is an attack on all – is a fundamental recognition that peace only comes at extreme cost.

It is important to appreciate how radical these three institutions – the EU, the Council of Europe and NATO – were when they were set up. Pre-war Europe not only lacked such supranational institutions: it lacked the very basis for them in that few of Europe's nations were genuine democracies, respecting human rights – including freedom of religion – and governed by the free will of free peoples expressed through free multi-party elections. Indeed the number of democracies dramatically declined in the 1930s as fascist and communist coups felled the democratic regimes of most continental countries. There is nothing inevitable in the rise of democracy in Europe, and we take it for granted at our peril.

There were no European institutions to slow, let alone halt, the descent into fascism and communism in the 1930s and mid 1940s. Nor was Europe much stronger in the realm of ideas. Britain's – maybe Europe's – most influential political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, described life as 'nasty, brutish and short,' and pronounced it axiomatic that 'power without the sword is mere words.' Thomas Aquinas, maybe Europe's most profound Christian theologian, legitimised war; and for all my childhood love of CS Lewis and Narnia, they were eclipsed by *The Lord of the Rings*, by his fellow Oxonian JRR Tolkien, which is a tale of war and degeneracy straight out of the trenches of the Somme and the beaches of Gallipoli. Mordor was Treblinka and Auschwitz two generations ago; it was Mostar and Sarajevo a generation ago; it is Mariupol and Bucha today. And Patriarch Kirill is there with the cross and mitre of the Russian Orthodox Church.

It is a well proven truth that democracies are far less likely to fight each other than autocracies, and the concurrent growth of democracy and supranationalism in Europe is the basis for the modern peace which reigns over most of our continent. The two go together: subtract democracy, and

NATO could easily become an aggressive expansionary organisation; subtract democracy, and the EU becomes a trade bloc without values of inclusion and peaceful coexistence; and subtract democracy and there is nothing whatever left of the European Convention of Rights, which is the reason why Russia, after the invasion of Ukraine and the imprisonment of opposition leader Navalny, could not conceivably remain a member of the Council of Europe.

Ukraine starkly exposes the roots of European peace as shallow and easily washed away by dictators and resurgent populist nationalism. We in Britain should be all too conscious of this. For while a long tradition of representative government has for centuries been a glory of England, it reached democracy less than a century ago and coexisted until a generation ago with imperialism abroad and imperialism even within the British Isles of the most ugly sectarian form in Ireland. It did so in Ireland at large until a century ago this year, when southern Ireland became independent after a famine when, as Sir Charles Russell, the permanent secretary of the Irish Office, put it in words of unspeakable callousness, the Irish were left "to the operation of natural causes." Thereafter, the growing clamour for Irish self-government was resisted, first politically then militarily, for a further 70 years until a century ago this year when southern Ireland finally attained self government. And British imperialism in northern Ireland persisted until the 1990s when the Belfast Good Friday Agreement at last brought peace, and the role of the UK government as honest broker rather than partisan across the sectarian divide.

The role of the UK government as a peace-promoting honest broker is once again in question today, after the Northern Ireland elections and amid a stark debate within the UK government itself on ripping up the Northern Ireland protocol to favour just one sectarian party in Northern Ireland. It is to be hoped that all parties, including our own government, will pay the price of peace and ensure that Ireland as a whole, north and south, continues with a completely open and unimpeded border to goods, trade and people which is the bedrock of the Good Friday Agreement.

But taking steps to maintain what we have already in terms of democracy and prosperity is a small price to pay for peace. The larger costs and sacrifices lie in building up the EU, the Council of Europe and NATO as far stronger institutions, better able to resist enemies within as well as without, to use Eric Abbott's image of Jerusalem. And for the churches and religions of Europe to do the same in their own communions and inter-faith partnerships.

The French people have, thankfully, just resoundingly defeated parties claiming that Europe was subject to a malign 'great replacement' of Christians with Islamic peoples and culture, and religious leaders need to preach unity

not division, and enshrine it in institutions too. Is it too fanciful to think of a European Union of churches and religions, alongside the political and economic institution of the EU? Should the Church of England not be wholly more ambitious than thinking in terms and common purposes of the Anglican Communion, and turn inter-denominational and inter-faith partnership into concrete institutions? I can hardly think of a greater and more positive Christian project for the next generation, or institutions better able to take a lead than Westminster Abbey and the Church of England.

We also need to take to heart those words of Churchill – 'In the centre of our [European] movement stands the idea of a charter of Human Rights, guarded by freedom and sustained by law.' Freedom and law. Most of the meetings of the Council of Europe are depressing recitals of a lack of freedom and breaches of law across Europe. Turkey is a member of the Council of Europe, yet has tens of thousands of political prisoners and hundreds of journalists in jail. The European Court of Human Rights has only a fraction of the resources needed to deal with the deluge of cases in respect of Europe's authoritarian and only quasi-democratic states, and it is surely time for minimum standards of democracy, freedom and judicial independence to be laid down for membership of both the EU and the Council. Hungary at present is blocking all further EU sanctions against Russia: this is clearly unacceptable.

And Europe's democracies cannot themselves remain ossified. As Thomas Dewey rightly observed a century ago, the cure for the problems of democracy is more democracy. The leading-edge practice of democracy today is about empowering the young – votes at 16 and far more young people elected to parliaments and assemblies – devolving power locally and enshrining diversity at the heart of all democratic institutions, needs to become the standard practice of all Europe's democracies, including here in England.

Greater equality, and a renewed mission to end poverty, are equally critical. Within England, there is a seven-year life expectancy gap between richer and poorer areas; if the poor – meaning those on subsistence wages or lower – of this great city, London, were all housed in a single place, they would become the second largest city in the land, larger even than Birmingham. A third of children in England today grow up in relative poverty, a far higher proportion than a generation ago, and poverty and subsistence wages have been the driver of extreme nationalist and populist politics across Europe. 'Peace only comes at an extreme cost,' and the richer regions and nations need to do far more in the next generation than the last to maintain it internally as well as externally.

The EU has long realised that in principle, alongside a single currency needs to come far greater redistributionist policies, and these are now taking shape in

the wake of the pandemic. They are as important to the sustainability of Europe as the 'extreme cost' which needs to be borne to secure energy independence and a sustainable low carbon future, about which we talk far more.

The price of peace also comes in a readiness to defend our values with power, soft and hard. The soft power of cultural partnerships and externally-facing institutions which champion values of democracy and freedom has never been more important. Maybe the greatest thing the UK does for European values is the huge inflow of international students to our universities, including the universities of Oxford and King's College London. The impact of Brexit in drastically reducing student inflows to Britain from the rest of Europe is a seriously retrograde step. Maybe our next greatest instrument of soft power is the BBC, which has demonstrated its world class reputation for fearless objective reporting in Ukraine, and should be expanded not contracted as an instrument of peace.

But we cannot shirk the imperative to boost hard power as well as soft, and NATO needs every bit as much enhancement as our universities and cultural institutions. By enhancement I mean not only a willingness of European nations to spend more on defence, on which Germany is now taking a lead alongside France and Britain. I mean boosting NATO as an organisation of democracies which preaches self-defence as the means to promote European and democratic values, not least in the partnership work of the US and Europe's armed forces with those in other countries, including in peacekeeping and nation building, which so important a part of the work of modern armed forces.

When writing the biography of Ernest Bevin, the British foreign secretary who forged NATO in 1949, I was struck by Bevin's insistence that it should be an 'organisation' not just a defensive alliance – hence the 'O' in NATO. That's why there is a NATO parliamentary assembly and a whole set of NATO youth and cultural institutions, all of which need strengthening. This is a particular role for Britain, as not only a leading NATO member but as a close strategic partner of the US.

The work of the Council of Europe has become more important to Britain for this same reason, and should be boosted, including far greater support for international human rights and development.

In these respects it is vital to see the Ukraine war as an extreme version of persisting war and conflict within Europe, not just as an entirely new manifestation of this evil. Indeed, by comparison with Milosevic and Serbia's

atrocities in Bosnia and Kosovo only 30 years ago, Putin and the atrocities in Ukraine are not particularly extreme, just a question of larger countries and more powerful dictators doing the same thing. Ukraine is Russia's third European invasion of the last 14 years: before it came its invasion of Georgia in 2008 and Crimea six years later. War, civil war and cold war still persist between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, all three of them European nations and members of the Council of Europe, and does a cold war, between Turkey and Cyprus over my still-divided native island, and both of those nations too are members of the Council of Europe.

We here in Britain think of the European Court of Human Rights in terms of relatively minor issues of government over-reach: in respect of eastern, central and southern Europe it debates matters of war and peace, life and death, and until the existing boundaries of Europe become a comprehensive zone of peace, stability and prosperity, instability across those boundaries will continue to be endemic even without dictators like Putin. This is not yet remotely close to happening.

In a path-breaking speech earlier this week, President Macron of France took as his theme the imperative for closer cooperation focused on shared tasks, and called for a new European Political Community, extending to European nations outside the EU including Britain and Ukraine – a symbolic partnership if ever there was one. Such a new political community would, as he put it, 'allow democratic European nations to find a new space for political cooperation and security cooperation in energy, transport, investment, infrastructure and the movement of people.'

The case for such a European Political Community, as an instrument of partnership and confidence building, seems to me unanswerable in the context of Brexit, and I hope it receives a warm response from our government. We have been paying the extreme cost of defending peace in the military conflict in Ukraine; structured and systematic political and strategic cooperation is a small additional price to pay, indeed it is hardly a price but a recognition of self-interest and mutual interdependence.

But in this place, and at this time of European strife, I don't hesitate in conclusion to return to Eric Abbott's injunction that, as with Christ's death in Jerusalem, 'probably the real enemies are within our gates.' I don't myself engage in much religious politics, but in preparing for this lecture I looked at what institutions there are for European inter-faith and inter-denominational co-operation, and they are distinctly lacking. Surely there should be a debate on new institutions which are the religious equivalent of the Council of Europe, focused on conflict resolution and the advancement of human and

religious rights. It would be great to hear from the leaders of this Abbey and this Church on what radical departures might be taken. For if peace only comes at an extreme cost, those most devoted to peace should be the first and foremost prepared to pay it.

Thank you.