

**General Synod of the Church of England**  
**Greeting**  
of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)  
Bishop Ralf Meister / Hannover  
08 July 2016

Your Graces,  
members of the Synod of the Church of England,  
dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

It is a great honour to attend this General Synod of the Church of England and to convey to you today the cordial greetings of the Evangelical Church in Germany.

I bring to you the greetings of the Council of the EKD, by the chairman of the council Bishop Professor Heinrich Bedford-Strohm,

the greetings of the plenary church conference and the presidium of the Synod, personally from the chair of the presidium Mrs. Schwätzer.

When I give you my regards as the Bishop of Hannover, there is a common bond between us, because King Georg I. was King of Great Britain and Ireland from 1714 and ruler of the Duchy and Electorate of Brunswick-Lüneburg (Kingdom of Hanover).

You come together in turbulent times. I'm aware that the decision in Great Britain for the Brexit is a national democratic decision, but with due respect for that, it has an enormous impact on the international, especially the European Situation and for Germany as well.

Please allow me to make short remarks about the new fragile European situation and our responsibility as Christians.

First: I was irritated, that the main reaction in Germany about the Brexit was a discussion about the financial and economic consequences of this referendum. The European dream is a dream of humanity and justice and not the question whether the stock-exchange is placed in London or in Frankfurt or about the future of the single market. But most important: The idea of Europe is based on shared values and peace.

Recently we remembered the Battle of Somme in 1916.

When we look for some voices, which proclaim a European perspective rooted in Christian values we find this voice in words and music from your nation: in the War Requiem from Benjamin Britten with the poetry from Wilfred Owen. Owen fought in the war zone of Somme and died in 1918: "My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity. [...] All a poet can do today is warn." Owen spoke as a Christian. What a strong sign of hope and reconciliation it was, when the War Requiem was first performed in the cathedral of Coventry in 1962. It will be the Christian charge, to warn of a separated Europe - in all the tendencies for a new nationalism and the modern attraction of political populists. A Europe split in gated national communities will undermine a common period of social, economic, cultural and peaceful welfare in Europe.

But the duty for the churches in Europe is not only to warn, but to give our people the hope, that the liberation in God's grace will be the condition for a profound understanding of freedom, justice and peace.

Second:

We in the EKD are on the way to celebrate the Jubilee of the Reformation in 2017. It will be the first jubilee in 500 years, which we celebrate in a deep ecumenical understanding with other denominations parallel to a fruitful interreligious dialog with Jews and Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and others. So we realise, that "the reformation is a world citizen". It interconnects us in a strong line with Christians all over the world.

The Meissen-Agreement states: „We will take steps to closer fellowship in as many areas as possible, so that all our members together may advance on the way to full visible unity.“

This is an ecumenical sentence, first for us and our churches. This is a sentence of faith and of hope. But this is also a strong political proclamation for our worldwide responsibility as Christians; a responsibility to take the challenges of the modern, complex and anxious world as an invitation from God himself to work for his creation.

In this world, "right" answers are not easily found. But we have the task to witness our believe in God to practice tolerance and to engage in difficult dialogues.

Christianity has a history of interdenominational persecutions, discriminations, violence and war. We know, that it took centuries to come from "conflict to communion" and live in "reconciled difference". May we owe our countries the story of the long way to the house of our



neighbours? We owe our people the story of tolerance and acceptance, of respect and dialogue, of reconciliation and peace in the light of the gospel.

We need a strong common narration of Europe in which our Christian experiences are still decisive.

Christians are resilient and resistant people. We are strengthened in the hope from the creator of heaven and earth.

The liberating message of the gospel was in the midst of the reformation. We listen to that message in different contexts and exiting times, like these troubling days in Europe.

The reformation was a catalyst for a new understanding of the church's role in society. In that tradition we stand - in England as well as in Germany, in the Anglican Church as well as in the Evangelical Church in Germany.

Let me end with a word from the protestant theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his "Letters and Papers from Prison":

"Choose and do what is right,  
not what fancy takes.  
Not weighing the possibilities,  
but bravely grasping the real.  
Not in the flight of ideas,  
but only in action is there freedom.  
Come away from your anxious hesitations  
into the storm of events,  
carried by God's command  
and your faith alone.  
Then freedom will embrace  
your spirit with rejoicing."

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God bless your synod.