

MARK RECKLESS

Member of Parliament for Rochester and Strood



Rt Revd Christopher Hill
Lord Bishop of Guildford
Chair, House of Bishops Europe Panel
Church House
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London
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HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

2nd July, 2012

Dear Rt Revd Hill,

Thank you for your letter dated 20th June.

I would like to begin this letter by thanking you, and the Church of England, for all your good work across the country. I know that the Church plays an important role in our society by providing spiritual, social and moral nourishment to millions of Britons and our whole nation and parliament is historically, and uniquely, entwined with our national church.

I also appreciate your recognition of "the emerging consensus in favour of a referendum on Britain's continued membership of the EU". While I recognise the Archbishop's Council has raised concerns regarding the result of such a referendum, may I welcome the Church's recognition that a referendum should take place and your keenness 'to provide a safe space in which constructive debate can take place.'

I suspect that we may well not entirely agree on whether European integration leads to human flourishing. I might raise doubts as to whether European integration has been especially forthcoming in bringing about the conditions necessary for human flourishing, especially when we give due consideration to the riots in Athens, desperately high levels of unemployment in Spain and the despair across the continent. Moreover, the "democratic deficit" which you rightly discern in the EU is not some unfortunate and easily remediable side-effect of the EU but the basis of its construction and development.

Irrespective of our differences on such matters, however, I welcome your position that the Church's official role during any referendum would be to provide a safe place in which constructive debate can take place, rather than seeking to take sides. Whatever the strongly voiced differences on the European Union between MPs, media outlets, academics and, most importantly, the British public might be, it is vital to have such public discourse. The Church has a proud history of supporting open discourse in this country and I join you in looking forward to the Church providing a neutral and equal playing field for everyone to voice their views as the country prepares for a referendum.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Reckless'.

Mark Reckless MP