

'Respect other people's identities'

by **The Right Reverend Robert Gillies**
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In the 1930s my father chose to leave the West Lothian of his birth.

Around the coal mining village where he had been brought up, and in whose pits he had held his first job, he saw a society that was not in a healthy position.

Much is said about the community spirit of mining villages and societies. My father never recognised this. He felt he had to leave it behind. He did so because he saw his future elsewhere and made the choice to leave the land of his birth.

And yet he remained a Scot all his life. His sense of personal identity in terms of who he was, in part shaped and to a degree tortured by his upbringing, was never affected by the political governance or al-

legiance of the place where he settled. He knew who he was. He was a Scot and always was so.

Almost 40 years later, I made a not dissimilar choice, although for different reasons. The country of my birth could not offer me the education that I was, and proved to be, capable of.

And so I chose to come to Scotland on the invitation of two Scottish divines, one

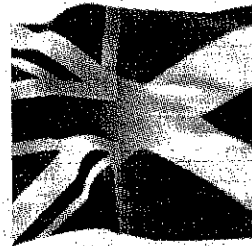
"My sense of identity is thoroughly Scots even though my accent is from Lincolnshire"

Presbyterian and one Episcopalian, to study.

My name is Scottish and for that I owe thanks to my father. But my identity has become Scottish simply through having lived and worked here since 1973.

My sense of identity is therefore thoroughly Scots, even though my accent is very definitely from Lin-

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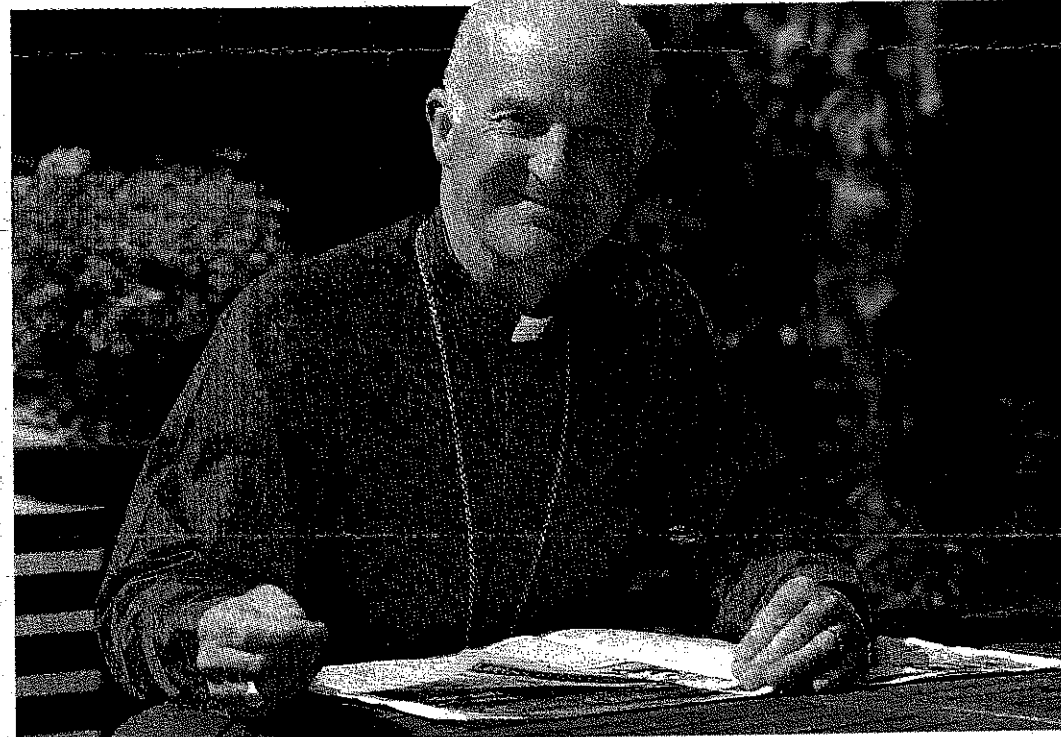
THE GREAT DEBATE

colnshire. Knowing who you are is important. But will self-identity and knowing who you are affect the referendum outcome? Let's consider this.

Go to the US or Australia, for example, and most people you meet will articulate their Scottish lineage and their historic Scots' identity.

There are more people overseas with a link to Scotland than the people who actually live in Scotland now.

Meanwhile, many of those who will vote are only recently here, east Europeans, Nigerians and before that Italians and Irish among others. What does



DIVINE CALLING: Rt Reverend Robert A Gillies, Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney

national identity mean for them? Many will vote in Scotland, but know their identity is elsewhere, particularly the more recent incomers.

There's a strong pull to-

wards Scotland becoming an independent, small nation. And an equally strong argument that says all Scotland needs are greater devolved powers within the existing UK.

Will personal self-identity in a multinational country, such as Scotland, shape the referendum outcome?

No one has sought to find the answer, so far as I know, but it would make for interesting market research.

From another perspective though, things over the next few weeks could go sour. I hope not, but we'll soon recognise it has when people in Scotland start making national identity a code or a measure against which to judge others pejoratively.

The misuse of flags, negative put-downs of political

opponents, the substitution of political critique with personal insult represent the worst form of self-identity.

Namely, one that has turned in on itself and become increasingly xenophobic. In this context people become polarised. Sections of society will view others with increasing suspicion and, worst of all, with malevolence.

Self-identity and knowing who one is is good, indeed it is necessary. But when it leads to a demonising and a negation of the other person it has gone sadly wrong. Others must be cherished.

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