London's Martyrs & Christian Unity

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The homily given at the ecumenical commemoration on 27 May 2006 at Tyburn is substantially contained within the following paper, given as the Christopher Morris Lecture for the Pontifical Society of St John Chrysostom on 13 November 2007.

To look at that great long list of names stretching from Thomas Bilney in 1531 to Oliver Plunkett in 1681, we see Catholics in communion with the See of Peter, those who saw themselves as Catholics but out of communion with the See of Peter; we see Calvinists and Lutherans; we see Anabaptists and Unitarians; we see people whose progressive ideas would not have turned a hair at Vatican II and we also see people whose ideas lie clearly beyond the zone of orthodox Christian doctrine. We see visionaries and contemplatives; we see those who (as we might say today) put their faith into action by doing public theology; we see exclusivist Puritans. We see those we would recognise today as Roman Catholics of all kinds and types; Anglicans; Presbyterians; Baptists; Congregationalists and Independents; Reformed Church Christians; Adventists; even proto-Quakers and proto-Salvationists.

Queen Mary I has taken the blame for a good deal of the suffering and intolerance meted out during the Reformation upheavals. But in truth, while her reign was brief and her government's urgent response to sedition among the Reformers was bloody, over almost exactly 150 years of blood-letting, the number of lives lost on both sides of the Catholic-Protestant divide was roughly even. The long Elizabethan repression of universal Catholicism, rather than England's separate home-grown version of it (and by Elizabeth's reign both these manifestations of the Church had undergone Reform and re-development), was as planned and programmatic, and as deadly, as Mary's. Possibly it was the crueller for being drawn out and cold blooded over five decades, rather than the zealous five year plan under Mary that exhausted even the hapless Bishop Bonner who conducted a good deal of it in London.

Many of the people who died have become honoured heroes in different parts of our Church as it now appears, divided on earth. But few of them saw themselves as sectarians, unravelling or undermining Christ's Church. People on both sides understood the urgency of fidelity to the Church – whether that seemed to be in Protestant purification of Catholic error or papal corruption; or welding it with new ideas to the cause of national self-determination; or cleaving with it to the universal Church through Rome, to safeguard its freedom from the world, to embody within that world, at the one mass of the universal and undivided Church, the very life and power of heaven itself. Indeed, a good deal of the force and vigour that went into the persecution of opponents by both sides was to ensure the visible unity of the Church and to prevent or drive out the spirit of schism and disobedience to Christ's will 'that they all may be one' (John 17.21).

John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* vividly claims to set out the stories of the terrible sufferings experienced at the hands of the Catholic authorities by the reformers and their followers who put their convictions about how they should be faithful to Christ ahead even of the unity of the Church, which they believed had completely lost its way. It is far from an objective history. It fails to record the persecution and (as we would say now) discrimination meted out by Protestants against Catholics. It also served for centuries as an indignant polemic on the innocent righteousness of Protestantism compared with the evils of the Catholic Church. Although it includes eye-witness accounts, it is really propaganda with a heady apocalyptic religious dimension. Its value as an historical source is therefore limited. For instance, for some of those whose names and professions it records, there is little or no other corroborating evidence as to whether they died on account of their faith; some of them, after all, may have been conspirators against Queen Mary's government, intending its violent overthrow. On the other hand, the same could be said about the Catholics who died – both in how they were seen at the time as traitors to the nation, as well as in how they were commemorated by posterity down to the present – demonised by one side, heroes to the other.
In those described in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, we see the Protestant people who became inspiring examples to generations of Congregationalists,

Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Evangelicals and Anglicans. To this day within these traditions, their innocence and principle confirm the rightness of their cause, the weakness and wrongfulness of their persecutors and above all the truth of what they taught and believed in. And Tyburn Convent, too, a sacred space enclosed for the honour of the Roman Catholic martyrs near to the most famous of London's places of execution, likewise attests to a deep sense in Catholic identity in this country of wronged innocence, principle betrayed and persecution of true faith. People on all sides have not only used and celebrated their martyrs to define their own Church allegiance for centuries after, we have deployed them to signify and perpetuate our enmity towards those of our fellow Christians who are not like us – and to keep our enmity sharp and ready.

But there has also been a tradition down the years that reminds us that the stories are not black and white. People are complex and so are their motives; so is the history. Among the Reformer martyrs are Unitarians and proto-Baptists that the Protestant authorities put to their deaths alongside Catholic priests. There are also Anglicans who believed they were no less Catholic than Roman Catholics and who lost their lives at the hands of their fellow churchmen. To this day in the Church of England there are many who feel a very great affinity with the Carthusian martyrs and with Sir Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher, but who feel little in common with Archbishop Cranmer or Dr John Wycliffe. Indeed the first of the martyrs, Thomas Bilney, was a Catholic priest who – like contemporaries, including Thomas More and the Carthusians – was caught up in an atmosphere of spiritual renewal, hoping for positive reform and re-invigoration within the Church of his day. It was his inspiration to - and association with - more radical people like Hugh Latimer that led to his execution in 1531 on a conviction of heresy. In the twentieth century, however, he might have been enlisted for an active role in the *aggiornamento* of the Church under Pope John XXIII.

Three years after Thomas Bilney, the Prior of the House of the Salutation, the Charterhouse at Smithfield, John Houghton, led the list of those who could find no way to accept that the power of the King, to whom they were loyal,

could override the authority of the one Church and divide its teaching to secure a divorce. His brother Carthusians like him wanted to be left in peace to lead their life of contemplation. But silence speaks volumes and they soon followed him to their deaths. Their breath-taking holiness had already caught the imagination of many in the English Church hoping for change and renewal. Lord Chancellor Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher of Rochester, their admirers and two of the greatest men in Europe, before long went the same way. The very next year in 1536 we also witness the loss of the great Bible translator, William Tyndale, murdered by the agents of the Holy Roman Empire in Flanders at London's request; and then in 1540 went Thomas Cromwell, the confiscator of the monasteries and architect of Henry VIII's schism from the see of Rome.

But among all these senior clergy and statesmen, several princesses and peers of the realm, what is the story of the less famous: the priests, the pastors and the lay people? And why is what happened to them then significant for us and our future? We can look at King Henry's reign and see the examples made of quiet monks, friars and faithful, local parish priests singled out. They must all have thought that the world had taken leave of its senses. Then again, we also see Protestant agitation among the choirmen at the King's own Chapel of St George at Windsor swiftly stamped out. All in all, we behold a message that no Reformer or Catholic can step out of line from the royal control of the Church, unforgettably rammed home to the London lay people at their markets and places of recreation and assembly: Smithfield, Tower Hill, Tyburn, and St Thomas' Waterings at the edge of Southwark on the Old Kent Road. In King Edward's short reign, policy avoided making martyrs of Catholics in the capital, but the early Baptist cause and the Unitarians each lost a significant lay leader.

In Queen Mary's time, apart from a few too prominent Reformer clergy (like Archbishop Cranmer and Bishop Ridley of Rochester, Cardinal Fisher's successor, who refused to return to their one-time Catholicism), it is remarkable how few ordained people lost their lives. Instead the burden is borne by traders and craftspeople, (as we might say today) the small business

entrepreneurs, the new professionals, the aspiring new commercially minded, the newly self-conscious lay people. These were people who had been exposed to innovation, thinking with new ideas and wanting the same freedom that brought results and prosperity in their working life for their outlook on religion in a rapidly developing society. See the Protestant apprentices, weavers, tailors, upholsterers, painters, brewers, fullers, lawyers, sawyers, smiths, labourers, merchants who met their end, often at a series of carefully scheduled show-piece group executions: at Uxbridge, Stratford-le-Bow, Smithfield, Staines, Barnet, St George's Fields in Southwark (now the site of St George's Metropolitan Cathedral), Islington and Brentford.

Then, in the long reign of Queen Elizabeth, it is remarkable to see how many who died, all Catholics except for the honoured early Congregationalist ministers Henry Barrow and John Greenwood, were young men. Some of them had been Anglicans who deliberately and courageously become Catholics and to be ordained priests, like William Filby, Thomas Cottam, Luke Kirby and Laurence Richardson and finally made an example of on 30 May 1582. Perhaps they were attracted by the sense of danger and daring, or the romanticism of a just and wronged cause that needed defending with a kind of chivalric service. During the reign their number was slowly but surely added to, as capable and brave men like William Gunter, or Polydore Plasden, or Robert Southwell, who might once have had an alternative future of success and prosperity ahead of them, but who chose instead the risk of death for being a Catholic Christian ordained to offer the illegal Mass. Some managed to stay hidden and ministering for years. Many were caught; and with them too went the lay people, like John Roche or Anne Line, who had not only assisted them but whose spiritual needs had encouraged them to embark on the journey that would lead to martyrdom in the first place. The government of Elizabeth, like Mary's, exhibited in public the result of what active disloyalty to the Crown's religious dispositions meant. There was a slow succession of hangings, the priests being drawn and quartered as traitors, at Tyburn, St Paul's Churchyard, Mile End Green, Isleworth, Shoreditch, Lincoln's Inn Fields, Kingston, Clerkenwell, St Thomas' Waterings, Fleet Street, Gray's Inn, Clerkenwell and Smithfield. On occasion, the executions took place at

different places in what is now greater London on the same day. Sometimes years went by between the martyrdoms; sometimes a few months, or a few days. Still no one can have missed the point.

As for the reigns that followed, it is not often realised by Roman Catholics that the Anglican authorities of the time also tried and executed Protestants for heresy, just as the Crown despatched Catholic priests for treason. And during the Commonwealth's Puritan ascendancy, Anglicans too suffered alongside Catholics, including the King himself, Charles I, murdered to cut the Church of England off at its head and subdue the Church life of its lay people. It was not until the 1st July 1681 that this whole sorry saga of mutual destruction and recrimination ended with the execution of the Catholic Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, St Oliver Plunkett, at Tyburn.

To understand the true and lasting significance of all this for us today, we need to go back and witness what happened on the 30 July 1540 in the time of Henry VIII. That was the day when six priests went to their deaths together at Smithfield. Three of them had become noted proponents of reform, not unlike Thomas Bilney, but going further than he had done in their thinking. The others were refusing to accept the King's Divorce and the royal supremacy over the Church of Christ. It is not right, or even illuminating, to read back our own defined lines of Church separation into the uncertainties and mixed allegiances of Henry's reign (the following event, after all took place nine years before the publication of the first of the Books of Common Prayer). But let us envisage them, at least in embryo, as three Protestant reformers and three Catholic recusants. Their death together was meant to be a spectacle. The three Reformers were sentenced to be burned for heresy; the three Catholics to be hanged, drawn and quartered for high treason. They were taken from Newgate prison, bound side by side on hurdles and dragged along the street to Smithfield nearby. On each hurdle there were two men, one a Protestant, the other a Catholic. Each was a priest, whatever changes to their thinking the times had brought about. Perhaps they knew each other. Perhaps they had served beside each other in neighbouring parishes. Perhaps they had been friends. Perhaps they had debated the new religious

ideas and the dangerous politics of the day together – vehemently, or perhaps gently and eirenically. Perhaps they had fallen out over it all; perhaps they had remained friends despite their disagreement. We do not know. History only records that, after their time together in prison, brother disciples of Jesus Christ to the end, they went to their deaths singing and praying together, separated only by the method of their execution. As the Bishop of London, Dr Richard Chartres, reminded us - Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants alike - who all attended the moving commemoration of the Carthusian martyrs at Charterhouse in 2005, we can see that the martyrs on each of the sides of the Church's lethal divide are part of the history of all of us – all of them together belong in the story of each of our traditions, just as much as each of our churches is not descended from one side or another, because we have all been shaped by a past which we have in common. The six Protestant and Catholic priests who were martyred together in 1540, and the manner of their martyrdom, makes us reflect that in the moment of their sacrifice they went beyond the separations of this world and were embraced in union with Christ. In him they found again their unity with each other – in prayer and in taking up the Cross as they followed him (Mark 8.34).

After a century and a half that began with so many changing directions, competing loyalties, complex motives and clear, brave choices during confusing and impossible times, and that ended, even after the bitter experience of the Civil War and the Restoration, with a final burst of yet more persecution of Catholic priests, England finally lost the will for further mutual recrimination, the extermination of opponents and capital intolerance. By the time of the House of Hanover, anti-Catholicism may remain a vicious prejudice (and that certainly played a part in the violent policy towards Ireland and the Jacobites in Highland Scotland), but no one much had the stomach for cleansing the nation of the adherents of Catholicism. After the removal of the monasteries, the Reformation itself, the loss of communion with Rome, the rise of the sovereign nation state, the fellowship with Protestantism in other states (especially in Germany and the provinces of the Netherlands) and then England's explosion in Civil War, there had come a different world. It was marked by the dawn of modern science; the British Enlightenment; the de-

Christianisation or de-Christification of humanism; the consciousness of personal liberty and self-determination; new political thinking about what human society is; the reduction of absolute monarchy and the government to the will of the people; the development of the notion of tolerance not just as pushing the limits to breaking point but as a basic Christian virtue in the name of the love of Christ; the rise of philanthropy; the establishment of a national education system and comprehensive provision for social and charitable services in which all could unite as one nation for the common good: – all these directly descend from the years of pain, suffering and martyrdom. Here we can recognise the beginnings of our modern liberal democracy, its pluralism and equality, its respect for minorities as well as for democratic principles, its government according to the rule of law and its commitment to the human rights of justice and liberty. Are these not, at least in some part, the fruit of the sacrifice that the martyrs made in our society's midst at its formative stages, and that makes the foundations or our civilisation genuinely Christian? And if this is so, is it not more the case that the same sacrifice shows the Church at the heart of that society to be at its own heart one – what Archbishop John Habgood of York called 'the soul of the nation'; and that this unity can transcend the apparent divisions of Christianity and after all can indeed be made visible in our midst? Can it not thus continue to draw the world ever closer within itself, as it makes its way towards its destiny of returning to the Father in perfected peace and charity? (John 12.32)

Pope John Paul II, writing in *Ut Unum Sint* in 1995, drew out the theological significance of the martyrdoms on all sides of the Church in its separations, and the fundamental unity they have come to serve, together with the path towards the salvation of the whole of humanity which they mark. He asks us to look at them from God's perspective:

> We Christians already have a common Martyrology … it shows how, at a profound level, God preserves communion among the baptised in the supreme demand of faith, manifested in the sacrifice of life itself. The fact that one can die for the faith shows that other demands of the faith can also be met. I have already remarked, and with deep joy, how an

> imperfect but real communion is preserved and is growing at many levels of ecclesial life. I now add that this communion is already perfect in what we all consider the highest point of the life of grace, *martyria* unto death, the truest communion possible with Christ who shed his Blood, and by that sacrifice brings near those who were once far off (Ephesians 2.13). (UUS 84.1)

So we look to the historic martyrs, not to keep old enmities alive into our own day, but to realise that 'their moment has come' not at the point of murderous division between Christians (who were once famed for their love of one another), but as the Church finds itself in complete, perfect unity with Christ 'reconciling all things to himself, … making peace by the blood of his Cross' (Colossians 1.20). Therefore, when we say that the Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church, we cannot merely mean that it sustains it and makes it grow. What we really mean is that the martyrdom of Christians reveals the Church at its most radical and original at the same time as its final point of destination, in its perfect union with Christ. Nor is this merely a manifestation of our personal spiritual aspiration for our life in Christ. Union with Christ is inseparable from union in the Church – the epiphany of one is incompatible with the invisibility of the other. And the reason for this is not for me, or even us - it is for the world. The whole point of the mission of Christ - and his foundation of his Church - is the unity of creation, in the unity of God the Trinity, through the unity of Christ true God and true Human, for peace and justice for all humanity: 'Father, may they be one, as you and I are one, so that the world may believe' (John 17.21)

What we have considered on this occasion comes from within the experience of Christians in England and how they have surpassed their history of enmity and lethal rivalry, to build an ecumenism in society that augurs well for an ecumenism of Christians in the Church. The heart of it, however, belongs to the experience of all Christians who encounter and overcome divisions in the life of the Church, and who also witness to Christ in a bitterly divided and harmed world. It is doubtless because of this that in the twentieth century more have given their life in obedience to Christ than in all the preceding

centuries put together. The reality of the one Christ, the rock from which we were all hewn, and the source to which we all return, has to be faced, however much in our partiality and overstretched distinctiveness we would like him just to be on our side. Pope John Paul points to the true path (also in *Ut Unum Sint*):

> When we speak of a common heritage, we must acknowledge as part of it not only the institutions, rites, means of salvation and the traditions which all the communities have preserved and by which they have been shaped, but first and foremost this reality of holiness. (UUS 84.3)

So it was that in recreating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 1933-34, Father Paul Couturier in Lyons refused to pray for one particular outcome to ecumenism, or for the reconciliation of mere organisations, or for people's conversion to different points of view or to alternative allegiances. He prayed above all for sanctification –that Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Protestants and all human people of whatever faith, would become more holy. The closer to God in holiness they grew, the closer to Christ they would come; the closer to Christ, the closer to each other; the closer to each other in the fellowship of the Church, the closer to the Father – so that the world might believe. Above all it is through the vision of faith and grace in the ultimate life's moment of the martyrs, which was also the moment of their death, that we see this perfect union with God in Christ, the completeness of the Church in communion with God the Trinity and the fellowship of the saints. This is therefore the starting point for the unity of the Christians on earth, and the point of rapprochement not just for Catholics, Protestants and Anglicans, but for Catholic and Orthodox Christians too, with their common heritage and rites, their common as well as distinctive companies of saints and martyrs, whose very differences in life and death mark the unity of their witness to Christ and so point to a single ecumenical journey and destination.

And it is interesting to reflect on how vital this reconciliation is for the sake of the wider world, especially given the situation in which Eastern Christians live, in their interface with, indeed their life as the face of Christ to, the people of

Islam. The Western world has in the last few years thrust itself into the so-called lands of Islam, hoping from a western point of view that the distilled humane values of Christendom - mutual understanding; peace; non-violence; liberty; democracy and the rule of law; God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, so to speak - would soon become the 'default position' of those societies once they had been freed from tyranny and introduced to our post-Christian version of liberal secularity. But people of all faiths and none have been horrified to see the mutual recrimination, blood-letting, terrorism, murder of innocents, inequalities and injustice unleashed in a part of the world which was once renowned as the cradle of civilisation.

So the sword has once again been shown to be a failure, leading to terrible unforeseen consequences and enmities that will last for generations. Christians in the West should know better, from our own experience of history, than to shake our heads and merely condemn the hatred of non-violence, to which certain minorities feel driven because of their passion for their faith in God and their abhorrence at the values and beliefs of others and the way they are put into practice. The violence may sicken us as barbarism, and we can denounce the bombs and suicides as terrorism. We can be indignant at the plight of our fellow Christians in the Middle East, and we can take a range of positions on the actions and policy of Israel for Arabs in general, or for Christians and Muslims as Arabs in particular. But before rushing to judgment and taking sides in our mind, perhaps with a little humility and compassion we can recall that, little more than three hundred years ago, this was us. It took us 150 years to get ourselves out of the alliance between religious extremism and the dark arts of power politics. Indeed – let us hope – the final shout of this in our state is fading in Northern Ireland. And what we know of our own religion, its history and the scars that that has left inside us, means that we pray in a spirit of repentance and quietly joyful gratitude, that our evils in the past have been not only healed but transformed. What once made for bitter herbs has been redeemed and put to new use for new beginnings and new creations.

Archbishop Elias Chacour of Galilee, leader of most of the Holy Land's Christians in the Melkite Catholic Church, has called on the Christians of the west to come to Israel in a spirit of solidarity and friendship. But he implores us not to come taking sides. There are enough enemies in the Middle East, he tells us: there is no need for any more. What is needed are those who can be friends to people on all sides, those who can help people to talk to each other, to understand each other, to become aware of each others' suffering, to learn to allay fears, to find it in the heart to forbear and forgive, to find it in the heart to embrace the other and accommodate them in the land they feel is theirs by right and theirs alone: after all, says Abouna Elias, 'Jesus is my parishioner.' We in England with our martyrs, our difficult past that we have learned to hold as a gift in common, with our friendly and progressing ecumenical journey, perhaps have a gift we can share in Galilee, remembering to this day the saints in Jerusalem. Our martyrs signify not only how Christ shows his Church to be one, but also how his whole world can learn it is redeemed from loss and reconciled.

Moreover, when Jews, Christians and Muslims speak of sacrifice, atonement, self-emptying, obedience unto death, the efficacy of innocent suffering, and the potent significance of martyrdom, we are able to resort to the same language and bank of ideas, even when we contrast them. This is the way we comprehend, or at least approach, God's compassion, his power to redeem and save what is lost, his 'nature always to have mercy' and forgive. If we can do this within our own faith in a spirit of dialogue and re-evaluation, without losing our integrity but moving deeper in the mystery as it draws us in, we can also understand and be understood in the company of those with whom we share the faith of Abraham. After all, our Eucharist is supremely the experience and the occasioning of that self-outpouring which has atoned for us and is made available in the here and now, not simply for us, but for the benefit and peace of the whole world.

So, as the martyrs in all our different, once rival, Christian traditions come to rest as one in that eternal moment of sacrifice, uniting conclusively the Cross and Resurrection, the Eucharist and the life and redemption of all and each of

the disciples in the fellowship and communion of the Spirit, we trace not only the one Church willed by the Father and the Son bound together in indivisible prayer on the night before Christ died, but also the pattern designed by the Creator for his entire creation: the unity of all humanity in the peace and charity of Christ. Metropolitan Platon (Gorodetsky) of Kiev famously said, 'the walls of separation do not rise as far as heaven.' It is clear that Christian unity, therefore, in which the purification of memory needed for reconciling ourselves to each others' martyr traditions, is – again – not merely about the Church, but about the Church for the world, so that his 'kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.'

So finding once more the unity of Christians, a unity that is completely visible before the world, is an indispensable step in God's plan for the consummation of all things. It is interesting to recall that, in re-shaping the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it was Paul Couturier's appeal for both individuals and whole Church communities, and all people of faith in whatever religion, to join with the Christians in an honest search for advancing in God's holiness with a spirit of charity, peace, respect and friendship, that won him friends in the Hindu and Buddhist worlds, in Judaism and Islam, as well as across the Christian Church. Indeed in the very year of his death in 1953, he launched the first Week of Prayer observance in Morocco, so that Christians might pray alongside Muslims, as they too from their different starting point were converging upon God and might perhaps understand that (to quote the great Archbishop Michael Ramsey) 'in him there is no unChristlikeness at all.' Couturier's invitation to join in what he called spiritual emulation led in no small way to a spirit of thorough re-assessment of the Church's relation to other faiths, its attitude of ecumenism within the one Universal Church, and the place of the Church in the modern world itself, at Vatican II in the early 1960s. And as we think of our fellow Christians in the Middle East - in the Orthodox Church; the pre-Chalcedonian Churches; the Melchite, Maronite and Chaldean Catholic Churches; the Assyrian Apostolic Church of the East; as well as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant communities - as they relate to uncertainty and development in Islam and live between and alongside Jews and Muslims, so we in London, whose Church history stands

witness to great mutual suffering and injury, but has eventually delivered us to a position of trust, collaboration and commitment to full unity, need to be aware that our 150 years of martyrdoms and persecution may have been a hard and shaming lesson, but they have nevertheless borne fruit in a precious gift entrusted to us: a witness to Christ's power of reconciliation that is not so much for us as for others - a confidence that wrongs can be righted, that wounds can be healed, that humanity can be restored.

At the moment, says Archbishop Chacour in a most striking phrase, the Arab Christians and Muslims of the Holy Land are "paying the price for the West's guilt over the Jewish Holocaust". But the experience our country knew of living through mutual persecution for a century and a half, salving its wounds for even longer, but then healing from them and seeing that we share a deep and inseparable history with each other, has led us not to be enemy veterans merely tolerant of each other, but close friends, even 'soul friends'. In this we have discerned that guilt, blame, recrimination and resentment play no useful roles in the end. What have come to count, instead, are honesty, truth, trust, forgiveness, the humility to see ourselves as others see us, the grace to recognise in the lives of others the love of God and the power of what his mercy has achieved. What we have detected, as Pope John Paul was pointing us to in *Ut Unum Sint*, is the evidence for reconciliation.

So we look to our martyrs' blood, Protestant and Catholic, as we look to the Blood of the Cross, for its power to make peace. We revere our martyrs not because that defines our separateness or nurses the ancient grudges among us, but because they simply exemplify the holiness of God and his call to all humanity to be at peace and to make its way back to him as one. The martyrs' taking up their Cross and following Christ in the path of sacrifice - and all that this has meant to us in the past, and today in a new way - indicate that the world has a better future than living with the bitterness of memories still raw, whether they come from the Spanish Civil War, Rwanda, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Darfur, Armenia, the peoples and faiths of the Middle East, or after the history of the enslavement of Africans, or the age of European colonialism. Indeed in the aftermath of all of these there are constantly signs

and deeds of hope. Our witness, as a community of Christians with a collective memory that was wounded in the past and healed for tomorrow, is perseverance. We should know better than to judge others, who in our day have so much to go through to overcome hurt and enmity, when we took so long. And so our prayer is that bearing fruit through patience will not take others the 150 years it took us to learn our lesson of love and sheer humanity.

Our tough path through history is not over, but at least now we know enough to offer the world, and especially those who share with us the faith of Abraham, the driving force of life in our Church: that faith is the substance of things hoped for (Hebrews 11.1) and that in our sufferings and divisions we have actually seen the reconciliation of God and humanity - and the universal reign of peace, justice and goodness - in the perfect unity of the martyrs of all Churches, who belong to us all, with Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12.2):

> Peace on earth and mercy mild,
> God and sinners reconciled.