

THE KING GOES TO HAMBURG

A few weeks ago the King visited Berlin and Hamburg. Both cities had been the subject of sustained Bomber Command attacks in World War Two and there had been media speculation that an apology would be offered to the people of Hamburg for the incendiary bombing of that ancient port city.

In fact, something different took place, not unlike our own yearly pilgrimages to Gallipoli. While there was remembrance of past pain and loss, the emphasis was on the present and the future, a sense of welcome, and a sense of opportunity to make things better, just as Kemal Attaturk had articulated all those years ago.

The King read out the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation, which begins; 'All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. The hatred that divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class'. The response is of course; 'Father, forgive'.

That Litany was highly symbolic, given Coventry's familiarity with the bombing of civilian targets. It is read regularly in their Cathedral and elsewhere.

Another useful model is our possibly neglected General Confession. That is a corporate act of contrition, an acknowledgement of our human frailty, a good definition of sin (which occurs 'in thought, word or deed'), and an admission that the burden of sin is intolerable. The most important feature of the Confession is that we are not pointing the finger at others; there is no mention of fault in our neighbours. Our neighbours instead are kneeling beside us, reciting the same words.

The Confession ends with a reference to newness of life.

It's hard to process the effects of international conflict or civil war. We tend to default to blaming someone else. But that path leads nowhere, just to an endless cycle of recrimination.

It was good to hear that, post- Covid, the Turkish people welcomed us back to Anzac Cove. That act of hospitality towards what could easily be labeled as a group of 'invaders' bodes well for the future.

Likewise visit Hamburg and Coventry if you can. The voices of reconciliation are there to be heard, even as we contemplate past destruction. And the same will be required no doubt in Ukraine and in Sudan, in God's good time.

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