

CONSTANTINIAN ORDER DINNER
MAY 24th 2016
Drapers' Hall. London
Lord Carey

Your Excellency, President of Hungary:
Your Royal Highness; Your Grace; Your
Eminences; Sir Anthony Bailey, My Lords,
Ladies and distinguished guests, I am
honoured to offer a few thoughts on this
special occasion.

But first, may I expressed my, and I am
sure our sympathy to Sir Anthony Bailey,
on hearing of the death of his father last
week. And that, so soon after the death of
his mother a few weeks ago. Anthony's
commitment to the Constantinian Order is
outstanding as is his devotion to
ecumenical relations. We are all in his debt
as he is in our prayers.

But turning to this evening's historic
significance: As an Anglican well versed in
ecumenical matters, my first thought is
that the tiny relic, believed to be part of the
body of Thomas Becket, is an extremely
important sign of the journey of
reconciliation that Roman Catholics and
Anglicans have been on since the Second

Vatican Council. We are very grateful to the Archbishop of Esztergom and the President of Hungary for allowing this precious symbol of faith and sainthood to make its pilgrimage to London and Canterbury.

And yet, it is a daring ecumenical step. As a teenager, exploring the Christian faith, my over-the-top Protestant Vicar was all too keen to draw my attention to Article **XXII. Of Purgatory**. which said 'The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.'

Yes, that was the diet that my wife and I were brought up on when young. It took us a few years to see through the exaggeration of this Article- formed, perhaps excusably- at a dark moment in England's history. Few people, even then, actually worshipped relics and were much more inclined to admire and follow the faith that the relic represented.

So it is with the relic of St.Thomas. Like a stained glass window, we see through the

glass, to what that little piece of bone represented then, and now.

And yet, from another point of view we might think that St.Thomas Becket an unlikely ecumenical example. As John Guy's impressive biography on St.Thomas pointed out, he was not everyone's cup of tea! He was often uncomfortable company and given to changes of direction in policy that displeased and confused many. We might conclude then that St.Thomas is a most unlikely model of ecumenism.

But we should reconsider that judgement. Perhaps he is the just the right kind of model for our timid churches today - often seeking safely before speaking the truth, and more likely to be in air-raid shelters than out in the open fighting the enemy. Our times require models of faith who dare stand up to injustice and who are jealous for the claims of Christ. Wherever we look today we seek our Churches put to the sword and, in the ME, swept from their ancient homes. In the West we are often silenced by secularists and humanists.

Perhaps then, this saint, revered and honoured by our two churches, is a fitting ecumenical model.

You may recall from T.S.Eliot's magnificent play, Murder in the Cathedral,

there comes a point when the fourth Temptor argues that “Saint and Martyr rule from the tomb” and that Thomas should “Think of pilgrims, standing in line / Before the glittering jeweled shrine.”

Allowing himself to be martyred will, the Tempter promises, eventually see his enemies “in timeless torment’.

But Thomas in the play does not concede this. “Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain: “The last temptation is the greatest treason / To do the right thing for the wrong reason.” In other words, allowing himself to be martyred is the “right thing” to do—as long as he does not do so for “the wrong reason”—a desire for fame and retribution.

So, St. Thomas has literally come home! Born just a mile or two away in Cheapside, this relic reminds us of the cost of faith and the challenge that our disunity represents. Perhaps then he is just the right model for our times; a Saint to follow as well as venerate.

George Carey