Coventry and Dresden -a friendship spanning fifty years

13th Feb 2009

Coventry will mark a friendship spanning fifty years this weekend as the Lord Mayor and the Bishop of Coventry take part in anniversary celebrations in Dresden.

Coventry twinned with Dresden after the Second World War as an act of peace and reconciliation, both cities having been heavily bombed during the war, and this year marks the fiftieth anniversary.

While in Dresden next week the Lord Mayor, Councillor Andy Matchet, will give a speech celebrating the continued friendship the two cities share. He will also officially name one of the city's trams 'Twin City of Coventry' – a lasting reminder of the links between the two cities and will also lay a wreath remembering the victims of the bombings of both cities.

The Bishop of Coventry will be speaking at the Frauenkirche in Dresden. The text of his address is as follows:

First of all in the name of those of us who have come from Coventry our warm thanks to you, Dean Klemens Ullmann, for your ecumenical generosity in welcoming us to this Cathedral, redolent with the history of Saxony. Like so much of this city, it has been wonderfully restored.

Herr Ministerpräsident Tillich, Frau Oberbürgermeisterin Orosz, my sisters and brothers, citizens of Dresden.

I stand among you as the grandson of a Royal Naval Petty-Officer who served throughout the First World War, narrowly escaping death when his ship was sunk at the Battle of Jutland by the German Navy.

I stand among you as the son of an RAF sergeant who served in Egypt and Italy for much of the Second World War and was decorated for this service to the allied cause.

I stand among you as a citizen for Coventry, devastated by the Luftwaffe in 1940.

I stand among you as an Anglican Bishop in a Catholic Cathedral, painfully aware that our life together in Christ was disrupted 450 years ago, and that there is still much to repair.

This is the debris of history on which we all stand: a history of hurt and conflict; a history that could drive deep furrows of division between us.

But I also come to you standing on another history, a deeper and truer story: the history of God’s purposes for the world.

I stand among you as a member of a common humanity made in the image of God but troubled and

tarnished by human sin. I stand among other sons and daughters of people caught up in the conflict of war with your own memories of the terrible effects of war. I stand before you in a common grief and a common hope. I stand before you with a commitment to avoid the mistakes of the past and to ensure that our own sons and daughters grow up as friends, not as strangers and never as enemies.

I stand among you in common citizenship, members together of cities devastated by war, with my heart very heavy for the suffering inflicted by the British bombs of the RAF, and with my head bowed low. I stand with the words of Jesus on my lips, words that were said by Provost Howard after the bombing of Coventry, and words repeated each day in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral: ‘Father, forgive’. Forgive us all, all our sins. I come mindful of the words of Brother Alois, the leader of the Taizé community who, in his recent message to the European Community, wrote that, ‘Without forgiveness, there is no future for societies’. I come to you proud to take my part in the new future that the people of Coventry and Dresden have built on the violence of the past – a future forged out of reconciliation. And I stand before you with a commitment to seek the forgiveness of those who have suffered at the hands of my country and to build a future of peace for all our peoples.

In this historic Cathedral in this great city of Christian witness, I stand among you as a Bishop of the Church of England with a deep sense of fellowship with Bishop Joachim Reinelt of the Diocese of Dresden-Meissen and Bishop Jochen Bohl of the Lutheran Church of Saxony and colleagues from other traditions. I stand before you with a commitment to restore the unity that we have allowed to be taken from us. The Church of God is called to be a sign of the reconciliation that God intends for the whole of creation. There can be no excuse for letting the sign grow dim. In the solemn remembrance of today, may we stand together in the shadow of the cross, and may we find our hope in remembering the Christ whose arms were stretched out on the cross to reconcile divided humanity. May we, his people, embody the effects of his work in the Church and share it with the world. And on this day, we extend our special love and deepest respect to Rabbi . . . . and to the Jewish people, of whom Jesus was one.

May the peace of Christ be in this city and in the city of Coventry, and may we together continue to proclaim Christ’s peace in word and deed wherever there is conflict, and wherever the wounds of history need to be healed.

ENDS.