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### 12. Broken Bodies, Healed Body

#### Contemporary Martyrdom and Ecumenism

Peter Nguyen, S.J., Creighton University

#### Abstract

I demonstrate that contemporary martyrdom is a form of ecumenism because it is a dialogue amongst Christians from different backgrounds, founded on fidelity to the ultimate religious truth – the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. The most striking form of ecumenism is that of the martyrs who reveal the truth of all humanity's communion with Christ. This paper involves four steps. The first part acknowledges the scandal of early modern Christians making martyrs of one another which helped to divide the Christian body. The second demonstrates, according to John Paul II, that the martyrs of the twentieth century have contributed to the ecumenical movement. The third analyzes the shared martyrdom between the German Jesuit Alfred Delp and the Lutheran Helmuth James von Moltke, executed for being members of an anti-Nazi resistance group. The fourth concludes that these martyrs witnessed the truth of Christ, who is the universal truth that links another with oneself in a shared humanity.

Keywords: martyrdom, ecumenism, John Paul II, Alfred Delp, Helmuth James von Moltke

## **Introduction**

The word “martyrdom” is a contested term. For some contemporaries, martyrdom evokes stories of past heroic figures, and for others, the willingness to cling to a truth at the cost of status, honor, and life epitomizes an uncomfortable and outdated conviction that sanctions disrespect or intolerance toward other beliefs or value systems. Since 9/11 and the ensuing bloodshed in the Middle East, martyrdom has been popularly associated with politically and religiously driven fanatics who shed the blood of others and themselves. Within a Christian perspective, martyrdom presents a distinctive conundrum. When the Reformation split the Western Church into rival factions, death for the sake of one’s religious faith became common. Competing Christians were willing to become martyrs for their convictions and were equally wanting to make martyrs of fellow Christians. Accordingly, martyrdom in the sixteenth century was primarily an intra-Christian affair. If differing beliefs divided the Church, then the blood of the men and women from different Christian communities augmented the disunity of Christ’s Body. Moreover, the massive persecution and violence committed by different Christians helped to foster a privatization of religious truth or agnosticism of truth claims.

Nevertheless, another dimension of martyrdom has come to light as we examine the martyrs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: ecumenism among the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians, victims of Nazism, Communism, or Islamic fundamentalism. In this paper, I demonstrate that the contemporary witness borne to Christ to the point of bloodshed by Christians from different background is a form of ecumenism because it is a dialogue founded on a fidelity to the ultimate religious truth – the sovereignty of Jesus Christ – and is a public and personal declaration, wherein the word that is given to those who are inimical to the truth of the gospel is one’s flesh and blood. As opposed to an agnosticism of truth, the most striking form of ecumenism is that of the martyrs who reveal the truth of all humanity’s communion with Christ.

I approach this paper in four steps. The first part sketches the reason for religious violence in early modern Europe, explaining the scandal of Christians making martyrs of one another. The second part examines the writings of John Paul II who expresses the connection between ecumenism and martyrdom. These writings will provide the key to understanding the third part of the paper which analyzes the shared martyrdom between the German Jesuit Alfred Delp and the Lutheran Helmuth James von Moltke, who were imprisoned and executed for being leading members of an anti-Nazi resistance group – the Kreisau Circle. The fourth part demonstrates that these martyrs witness a graced truth – a truth which is Christ – and perceived the universal truth that links another with oneself in a common humanity.

## **Fratricide and Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe**

Martyrdom in the sixteenth century was an intra-Christian affair. Catholics, Protestants, and Anabaptists all claimed to be martyrs to Christ, and, in murdering one another, they claimed to be doing the work of God (York: 78). They celebrated their respective heroes, which created mutually exclusive martyrological traditions that became woven into their emerging distinctive identities. “The martyrs’ willingness to die for specific doctrines,” according to Brad Gregory, “fostered confessionalism and fueled antagonism” (7). Subsequently, martyrdom in early modern Europe helped ensure that Christians would be

members of different creedal communities, whose pronounced outlines have continued down to the present (Gregory: 7).

The early Christian understanding that right teaching was crucial to right living was well received in sixteenth-century Europe. Heretical teaching did not just destroy the heretic, but like a plague, it possessed the capacity to ruin thousands of lives (York: 79). It is for this reason that sixteenth-century religious authorities from different sides were impelled to contain and destroy it (Gregory: 84). Concerning those who were willing to die, Gregory quotes the biographer Richard Marius's incomprehension of Thomas More's willingness to die as a Roman Catholic martyr:

Still, we are left with the most puzzling question of all: what kind of man chooses to die for his faith. Martyrdom is an exceptional talent; that is why we make so much of it. And people like Thomas More, refusing to save his life by speaking a few words, remain mysterious to us as suicides are to those who love life and hate the thought of giving it up. It is all well and good to spell it out, as I have done, the intellectual reason behind More's supreme act, but somehow they do not get to the heart . . . As with all martyrs who are not insane, it may be argued that he died not for what he believed but for what he wanted to believe (517-18, quoted in Gregory: 101).

Gregory charges that Marius's bewilderment stems from a myopic secular vision. That is, More's experience and execution did not make him unique in an era when thousands of Christians refuse to save their own lives by accepting what they saw to be false beliefs (101). Gregory points out that if one fails to grasp martyrdom, especially amongst competing Christians, it is because one fails to understand the martyr's religiosity. Gregory writes, "By collapsing More's belief into a desire to believe, Marius seems to evince just this bewilderment" (101). Marius's judgment reveals an operating secular attitude that the willingness to die for religious views is irrational. For Gregory, "This is not an explanation, however, but rather simply the expression of secular values and beliefs different from those of the martyrs" (101). By contrast, many martyrs did articulate reasons for their steadfastness and enacted values shared in common with fellow believers in their respective communities of faith. Accusing the martyrs of fanaticism is merely an easy way to dismiss any intelligibility of the early modern Christian.

Furthermore, the desires for martyrdom existed at that time in a broad swath of the Christian population. Gregory points to a June 1579 letter from Alphonsus Agazzari, the Jesuit rector of the English College in Rome, to William Allen:

Within the college, so great is the enthusiasm of all students as they prepare themselves for death for the Catholic faith, that it would seem to be impossible that God would not powerfully assist such a devout and holy desire (104).

These hopes and ideals of martyrdom were held in high esteem by all Christians – Protestants, Anabaptists, and Catholics. Moreover, it would be a mistake to consider these yearnings to be compatible with suicide. The desire for martyrdom entails thanking God for life and the opportunity to witness, whereas suicide is a rejection of God's gift of life. People could legitimately desire to enter a life-threatening situation, such as being a missionary in

specific regions because they possess the honorable “desire to risk a shorter life that might end in a brutal death in order to help guide other souls to eternal salvation” (Gregory: 105). The challenge for the secular Western mind is to comprehend the religious commitments of these men and women.

In the mind of the early modern Christian, the religious and scripture-based beliefs led men and women to relativize temporal concerns and absolutize eternal interests. Men and women endured persecution and death because they took seriously scriptural “injunctions and promises.” Also, many of these martyrs did not die alone but rather journeyed towards their fate with their supporting communities. The public dimension of martyrdom is the antithesis of the isolated candidate for suicide. One could not describe these early modern martyrs as “marginal figures on the fringe” (Gregory: 112). Would-be-martyrs corresponded from prison with fellow believers. Friends and family encouraged future martyrs to cling fast to their respective beliefs, lest they put their eternal lives at risk. Moreover, these men and women carried each other’s burdens and consoled each other from prison. Far from being on the lonely road to death, there was a communal context to martyrdom in early modern Europe:

There was a solidarity in their suffering. They trusted in scriptures as God’s word and will, as his Church had preserved and promulgated it. They applied it directly to their concrete predicament, which helped them overcome fears of pain and death. Human contact was vital (Gregory: 118).

Moreover, not only are these martyrs not isolated pilgrims on the fringe of society, they were not making a proverbial leap of faith into the unknown. There was already a pattern to conform to “an ancient course of action, grounded in scripture and epitomized in the crucifixion of Christ himself” (Gregory: 119). The early modern Christian martyrs did not understand their choices and fate in theoretical terms but understood that God had given them concrete models in scriptures and the early Church. Their task entailed proper preparation through writing letters, praying, and rehearsing memorized biblical passages. The process of training and reading depended upon trust in God’s providence and promise. As they were being pushed to extreme conditions, the future martyrs gave themselves over to God’s promise of eternal joy, which relativized their temporal pain of torture and execution.

To ask the question about what kind of people die or kill for the faith demands that one must try to understand their conflicting religious convictions. In early modern Europe, Christians defended the doctrines that divided them because of their shared beliefs about what was at stake. They did not see their faith as a human invention, but rather as the definitive response to God’s revelation. It did bear upon cultural identity but believing in and rightly following Christ. For Christians to denounce their religious beliefs or not to celebrate their executed fellow brothers and sisters in the faith as martyrs, they would have had to doubt truth.

### **Ecumenism: John Paul II on the Fruits of Martyrdom**

The ecumenical movement in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is a dramatic reversal of the antipathy between Christians of early modern Europe. Instead of making martyrs of one another, Christians on a local level become martyrs together. Their spilled blood points to a unity in Christ and heals the division in the Body of Christ. To this must be

added the contribution of John Paul II's magisterium on the relationship between ecumenism and martyrdom. At the end of his pontificate, he had canonized 482 men and women and beatified a total of 1,138. The majority of those canonized and beatified had died a martyr's death, including a good number of those who suffered and died in modern times (O'Collins: 10). According to Gerald O'Collins, John Paul II demonstrated new theological thinking on martyrdom, giving martyrdom contemporary gravity by highlighting its contribution to the ecumenical movement (10).

In his integration of ecumenical theology with a theology of martyrdom, John Paul II interprets the history and the trajectory of the Church in light of the saying by Tertullian: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church" (1994: 37). That is, the Church of the first millennium was born of the blood of martyrs. The period of persecution and martyrdom of Christians happened between 64–311 CE. It must, however, be said that the persecutions against Christians, while brutal, tended to be brief and erratic. Christians enjoyed relative peace until the middle of the third century. Then, the persecutions became empire-wide under Emperors Decius (249–251) and Diocletian (304–306).

Despite the periodic persecution of Christians, the sight of Christian martyrdom in the Roman Empire, from the Christian point of view, according to G. W. Bowerstock, was to the advantage of the Christian community. Most martyrdoms of Christians occurred in arenas found in urban areas, especially under the Diocletian age, and "gave the greatest visibility for the cause of the nascent Church" (41-42). As a result of the zeal of the Christian martyrs, who saw themselves as fighting in the cause of Christ, putting Christians to death "exposed the Roman administrative machinery to the greatest possible embarrassment" (42). The martyrs, in the view of Bowerstock, received the fame akin to that of athletes and gladiators. Instead of setting an example, the Roman magistrates inadvertently created a spectacle that allowed Christians to be agents of their deaths, potentially winning over the crowds and strengthening the early Church. To be more exact, the early martyrs understood "Christ himself as the agent of their martyrdom, rather than the various governors that decree their deaths" (52). As such, the Christian martyrs turned the gladiatorial games against the Romans: "Criminals were supposed to die in fear; the crowds expected and even demanded this. Yet Christians so to speak, had a bad habit of dying happy" (York: 35).

In the contemporary age, for John Paul II, the Church has once again become a Church of martyrs. Recognizing that there have been heroic and courageous sacrifices made by Christians of all backgrounds against totalitarian ideologies, John Paul II states in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, "In our own century the martyrs have returned, many of them nameless, 'unknown soldiers,' as it were, of God's great cause. As far as possible, their witness should not be lost on the Church" (1994: 37). He added concerning ecumenism, "Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the saints and martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us" (1994: 37). John Paul II added that martyrdom is the work of God at both the universal and local levels, the vitality of the local churches leading toward a catholicity of the Christian peoples. For the pope, both martyrdom and the memories of the martyrs point to a more profound unity than division. The contemporary martyrs become forerunners and patrons of saints of ecumenism and embodiments of the hope of healed Body of Christ (Whitfield: 122).

In his message on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the pope likewise underscores the ecumenical dimension of the suffering and persecution of heroic Christians, recognizing that men and women of different Christian backgrounds drew closer to one another in their shared suffering for the sake of the gospel. He wrote:

Beneath the Cross of Christ, members of all the Churches and Christian communities were able to resist even unto the supreme sacrifice. Many of them, with the peaceful weapons of witness in suffering and of love, stood up in an exemplary way to their torturers and oppressors. Together with others – believers and non-believers, men and women of every race, religion and nation – they held aloft very clearly, above the mounting wave of violence, a message of brotherhood and forgiveness (1995a: 12).

In their joint witness against the evil of fascism, fellow Christians participated in the same suffering and redeemed Body of Christ, seeing one another as brothers and sisters. Accordingly, in this period, in which a totalitarian state would force Christianity to a private sphere or grovel for existence, these martyrs against Nazism demonstrated to the divided Christian body a public witness of fidelity to Christ's truth.

Concerning the Catholic Church's accommodation with Hitler, it is important to note that before the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor in January 1933, the bishops had banned Catholics from joining the Nazis. The German bishops in March 1933 reversed their policy of outright opposition to Nazism. For example, the Roman Catholic Conference in Berlin, despite disapproval of Hitler's antisemitism, stated in an April 25-26, 1933, meeting that "the bishops recognized joyfully that through the new [National Socialist] state Christianity had been promoted, morality improved, and the new struggle against Bolshevism and godlessness conducted with energy and success" (Matheson: 6). Despite the unease with Hitler, some Catholics in 1933 saw fascism as a third way between communism and liberalism – a more spiritual alternative to these competing, supposedly materialistic ideological systems. Much debate has ensued over whether Christians, including Catholics, in Germany could have foreseen in 1933 that the next twelve years would demand resistance against totalitarian state-sanctioned violence and require public witness to gospel values. Nonetheless, the goal of this paper is to demonstrate that the Christians, who chose to resist the evils of National Socialism, did so out of a shared love for Christ, and, thereby, laying the foundation for the modern ecumenical movement.

In the 1995 encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint*, the first ever issued by a Pope on the question of ecumenism, John Paul II stresses the urgency of making new efforts to overcome the divisions of the past among Christians because "Christ calls all his disciples to unity" (1995b: 1). More to the point, he took up the issue of ecumenism in relation with martyrdom. He wrote:

The courageous witness of so many martyrs of our century, including members of Churches and Ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church, gives new vigor to the Council's call [for unity] . . . These brothers and sisters of ours, united in the selfless offering of their lives for the Kingdom of God, are the most powerful proof that every factor of division

can be transcended and overcome in the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel (1995b: 1).

In praising the witness of Catholics and non-Catholic martyrs, John Paul II believed that their combined testimony was more than an expression of God's grace amidst the brutality of the twentieth century but also an exhortation to heal divisions and seek a universal truth. He wrote:

Despite the tragedy of our divisions, these brothers and sisters have preserved an attachment to Christ and to the Father so radical and absolute as to lead even to the shedding of blood. But is not this same attachment at the heart of what I have called a "dialogue of conversion" (1995b: 83).

Concerning the notion "dialogue of conversion" (1995b: 36), John Paul II urges that we avoid a false peace or indifference which brings about a complacency concerning the ecumenical movement. Conversion involves a spiritual and communal change of heart so that a more radical following of the gospel can be had, ridding ourselves of the antagonisms of the past and seeing one another as partners (1995b: 29). Genuine dialogue entails the self-realization or maturation of every individual and every community, involving the human subject in his or her entirety and the subjectivity of every dialogue partner. The way of dialogue as embodied in a witness unto death is more than just an exchange of ideas, but ultimately is an exchange of selves (1995b: 28).

Dialogue within a Christian context also presumes a universal truth and a common belonging. That is, the universal truth shared by Christians is the Lordship of Christ. This Lordship becomes most relevant in a fascist regime that demands the complete obedience of a person to the state and its ideology. A totalitarian, fascist state, such as Nazi Germany, becomes "a secular religion" in its "exaltation of the supremacy of the national community over individualism, through aggressive permutations of social control and engineering" (Griffin: 32) – what the Bible would call an idol. Although Martin Luther rejected and Thomas Aquinas cautiously disfavored organized Christian resistance to civil authority because it would create political turmoil, a monstrous, idolatrous state confronted the German Christians between 1933–1945 (Jeanrond: 190-92). As soon as Hitler's power became firmly entrenched in 1933, Christian leaders began to fear that the Nazis' ideological, totalitarian program allowed no real space for the free exercise of the Christian faith (Jeanrond: 191). Speaking truth to power was demanded. In essence, Catholics and Protestants' shared conviction in the sovereignty of Christ, whose kingdom, though is not of this world, surpasses all kingdoms of the world, was at stake.

With their common resistance, some of which led to a mutual shedding of blood, the contemporary martyrs from the different Christian denominations of the Second World War do not appeal to some rigid fundamentalism of politically secured institutional reality. Instead, in their witness, they manifest how unity is received by way of the discovery of truth in love and the self-giving of love (Whitfield: 122-23). Love of truth, John Paul II, emphasizes, "is the deepest dimension of any authentic quest for full communion between Christians" (1995b: 36). Without truth and love, and without a willingness to suffer for the sake of truth, any attempt at unity is facile. To this end, martyrs from different Christian backgrounds exemplify unity, because in peaceably suffering for the truth, these men and women bear witness to reconciliation received rather than manufactured. In this sense, martyrs demonstrate "a

dialogue of conversion,” living lives of repentance and absolute trust in the reconciling power of truth in Christ (John Paul II 1995b: 82). The lives of these men and women, alive in the memory of the churches, help to repair the damage to the Body of Christ:

In a theocentric vision, we Christians already have a common *Martyrology*. This also includes the martyrs of our own century, more numerous than one might think, and it shows how, at a profound level, God preserves communion among the baptized 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 once were far off (John Paul II 1995b: 84).

Following John Paul II’s line of reasoning, contemporary martyrs reveal a full communion for which Christians strive.

Even more explicitly, in his homily on the Third Sunday of Easter in May 2000, an “Ecumenical Commemoration of the Witnesses to the Faith in the Twentieth Century,” the pope praised the witness of Catholic and non-Catholic martyrs as revelations of God’s grace in the midst of the twentieth century’s tsunami of savagery and tyranny. In that celebration, he proclaimed:

The precious heritage which these courageous witnesses have passed down to us is a patrimony shared by all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities. It is a heritage which speaks more powerfully than all the causes of division. The ecumenism of the martyrs and the witnesses of the faith is the most convincing of all; to the Christians of the twenty-first century, it shows the path to unity (2000: 5).

In particular, the pope underscored the witness of the Lutheran pastor Paul Schneider, the first Protestant clergyman imprisoned, tortured, and murdered by the Nazis for his public anti-Nazi stances. Overall, in taking up the intersection of ecumenism and suffering for the faith, John Paul II exhorts fellow Christians to see a common heritage that is already present and to recognize the riches of Christ and the continuous work of the Spirit in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, even to the shedding of their own blood.

### **The Case of Alfred Delp and Helmuth James von Moltke**

This section investigates the ecumenical dimension of the martyrdom of the Jesuit priest Alfred Delp and the Lutheran Helmuth James von Moltke. Delp and Moltke were German leaders in the anti-Nazi resistant group the Kreisau Circle. They organized and planned a post-Nazi German society based on Catholic Social Teaching.<sup>1</sup> Together they were imprisoned,

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<sup>1</sup> At that point, there were two encyclicals on Catholic Social Teaching – *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. *Rerum Novarum*, published by Leo XIII on May 15, 1891, emerged out of critical discussion on the modern forces of change and upheaval in industry, science, and labor along with the increasing disparities between rich and

tried, and sentenced. Moltke was executed on January 23, 1945, and Delp was executed on February 2, 1945. In the shared collaboration and witness unto death of Alfred Delp and Helmuth James von Moltke, we have a concrete example of martyrdom blossoming into an ecumenical phenomenon.

The Kreisau Circle was started by Moltke, who was born in Silesia on March 11, 1907. He studied history and law, being educated in Berlin, Vienna, and Oxford. As Hitler was rising to power, Moltke did not hide his antipathy for the Nazis. He warned in 1933, “Whoever votes for Hitler votes for war” (Balfour and Frisby: 54). At the outbreak of the Nazis’ invasion of the Soviet Union, Moltke believed that Germany would lose the war from the outset and that it would be necessary to establish a group of leaders to rebuild Germany. He made contact with the provincial of the German Jesuits, Fr. Augustin Rösch, asking for assistance. In one of their clandestine meetings, while discussing the differences between the Catholic and Lutheran churches Moltke surprisingly added, “As a Protestant, there is one thing I want to say to you: We must unite in order to save Christianity, which is there and to make our concern the re-Christianization of the working world” (Bleistein: 258). Rösch then missioned Alfred Delp to help design a new social order in Germany rooted in Catholic principles.

Delp joined the Jesuits in 1926 and was ordained a priest in 1937. As early as 1936, Delp was preaching and writing against the Nazis tyranny, particularly their idolatry of race and subversion of the Christian message. At the outbreak of the war, Delp participated in a clandestine network to help Jews escape to Switzerland from Munich, and from 1942 onward, he cooperated with the Kreisau Circle, informing intellectuals and leaders from Catholic, Protestant, socialist, and trade union backgrounds on Catholic Social Teaching. Though Moltke was the leader of the group, Delp was its intellectual. Eugen Gerstenmaier, a Lutheran pastor in the group, referred to Delp as the one who had the ability not only to appreciate different theological and political viewpoints but to integrate them into a whole (Müller: 50).

In 1944, as part of a broader crackdown on conspirators and dissenters, the Nazis began arresting members of the Kreisau Circle. Moltke was arrested in mid-January, causing a negative impact on the Kreisau Circle. Though Delp was the intellectual of the group, Moltke was its leader. As a result, the group’s activity came to a halt. Nevertheless, a prominent fruit did indeed emerge within the Kreisau Circle after their operative planning ended. While awaiting trial, the members of the Circle, including Delp and Moltke, discovered that they were in adjoining cells. Their partnership with one another and God reached a more profound intensity. What was founded among the imprisoned members of the Kreisau Circle was not a new social program, but prayer (Nguyen: 19). In these months of imprisonment and awaiting their fate, an ecumenical community emerged within a Nazi prison. “We four pray here, two

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poor. Workers were no longer protected by guilds or supported by public institutions of religion. *Rerum Novarum* defended the right of private property, criticized unrestricted capitalism, argued for a living wage for workers, and affirmed the right of labor to organize and, when necessary, strike. *Quadragesimo Anno*, published by Pius XI on May 15, 1931, commemorated the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. It reinforced the Church’s solidarity with the plight of workers during the Great Depression; criticized the enormous, increasing disparity between the wealthy and the poor; clarified the rights and duties of labor and capital; and suggested a “safe road” for repairing the socioeconomic ills that would avoid the errors of both unrestrained capitalism and collectivism (fascism or communism). It suggested that the right to private property is not absolute and workers with families should be given a family wage.

Catholics and two Protestants, and believe in the marvels of God” (88), wrote Delp in a letter dated January 4, 1945.

The cooperation for a better Germany and friendship amongst men of different backgrounds that had begun during the clandestine meetings now bloomed into a spiritual communion. Through whispers, Delp and friends shared their prayers or meditations on particular Bible passages. They looked to the parable of the wheat seed in John 12:24 (“unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit”) as an interpretation of their impending death. In a letter to his brother Jesuits at the end of December, Delp referred to this group in prison as “this praying *Una Sancta* in chains” (60). The “praying *Una Sancta* in chains” points toward a new mission for Christians. Delp wrote the following in a Christmas letter after he received a small Christmas gift from a fellow Protestant prisoner:

This was a beautiful Christmas gift. And if we are outside again, we should show that more as it was meant . . . History will have to carry further the burden and inheritance of the divided churches. The division should never again become a scandal to Christ. I believe so little in utopian ideas, but Christ is nevertheless undivided, and where there is undivided love, we are led to him . . . The Lord dedicates us to a new mission (76).

The word “Christ” for Delp stands above denominational differences. Both Delp and Moltke learned this in the Kreisau Circle, particularly during their time in prison. For the different captive Christians, engaging in communal prayer transformed them into an undivided Body of Christ.

In the context of the captive members of the Kreisau Circle, their common prayer and spiritual friendship communicated an *a priori* belonging to a reality – Jesus Christ – that suffused their witness against National Socialism and formed it from within. The trial of the Kreisau members, including Moltke and Delp, took place during January 9-11, 1945 and revealed this bond to Christ. The presiding judge for the trial was Roland Freisler, known as “Red Roland” because of his tendency to work himself into a state of rage (Bleistein: 374). During trials targeting Nazi resisters, Freisler would shriek so loudly that sound engineers told him he was damaging the microphones. As presiding judge, Freisler ensured that all defendants would appear undignified. The defendants would receive brutal treatment at the hands of the Gestapo before the trial. They were poorly fed and had to hold up their pants because their belts and suspenders had been confiscated. Freisler reduced all the other participants in the trial to mere extras: the accused, their court-appointed defense attorneys, the prosecutors, and even his colleagues on the panel. As in the case of Alfred Delp and Helmuth James von Moltke, he berated, vilified, and mocked the conspirators.

Alfred Delp was the first defendant called to the stand. Freisler began the questioning in a normal tone of voice that may have given the defendant the impression that he would receive a fair trial. Freisler asked how Delp had come to know Moltke and the others. What did he discuss with them? What did he know of the other meetings held by the Kreisau members? What was considered at the Kreisau meetings? Why did the Kreisau meetings, concerned with a future German society, not include a single National Socialist representative? Delp stood calmly and with composure, responded to each question in a low, even tone.

Freisler's voice though gradually began to rise as he pushed further: What were the aims of such meetings? What future German society were you discussing – one that would exist after the defeat of the Nazis? "Defeatism!" Freisler shouted. He screamed that such talk amounted to treason and launched into a tirade against Delp:

You miserable creep, you clerical nobody – who dares to want the life of our beloved Fuhrer taken . . . a rat – that should be stamped on and crushed. Now tell us, what brought you as a priest to abandon the pulpit and get mixed up in German politics with a subversive like Count Moltke and a troublemaker like the Protestant Gerstenmaier? Come on, answer (Bleistein: 377-78).

Delp calmly and firmly responded with the following:

I can preach forever, and with whatever skill I have I can work with people and keep setting them straight. But as long as people have to live in a way that is inhuman and lacking in dignity, that is as long as the average person will succumb to circumstances and will neither pray nor think. A fundamental change in the conditions of life is needed (Bleistein: 378).

In the case of his trial, Delp understood that fidelity to his God-given mission required him to suffer the evil of being imprisoned and mocked. The Nazis' reign of sin and oppression was absorbed by Delp's courageous fidelity to his Christian and Jesuit identity.

The following day, it was Moltke's turn to face Freisler's interrogation and continued assault on the Christian faith and the Jesuits. Again, the initial questions were calm. Then, in expected fashion, Freisler began to raise his voice when broaching the issues related to Moltke's anticipation of a German defeat and his plan for a new German society. Freisler exploded:

All Adolf Hitler's officials set about their work on the assumption of victory, and that applies just as much to the High Command as anywhere else. I simply won't listen to that kind of thing – and even were it not the case, it is clearly the duty of every single man for his part to promote confidence in victory (Bleistein: 381-82).

Freisler's final tirade targeted Moltke's collaboration with Delp and the Society of Jesus:

And who was present [at these meetings]? A Jesuit father! Of all people, a Jesuit father! And a Protestant minister, and three others who were later condemned to death for complicity in the 20 July plot! And not a single National Socialist! No, not one! And the provincial head of the Jesuits, you know him, too! He even came to Kreisau once! A provincial of the Jesuits, one of the highest officials of Germany would not touch a Jesuit with a barge-pole! People who have been excluded from military service because of their attitude! If I know there's a Provincial of the Jesuits in a town, it is almost enough to keep me out of town altogether! And the other reverend gentleman! What was he after there? Such people should confine their attention to the hereafter, and leave us here in peace! And you went visiting bishops! Looking for something you lost I suppose! Where did you get your orders from? You get your orders from

the Fuhrer and the National Socialist Party. That goes for you as much as any other German!” (Bleistein: 382).

The decisive moment during the trial, according to Moltke’s letter to his wife Freya, was uttered from Freisler, who said, “Herr Graf, we National Socialists and Christians, have one thing in common and one only: we demand the whole man” (409). Moltke reflected on Freisler’s remark:

I don’t know if the others sitting there took it all in, for it was sort of a dialogue – a spiritual one between [Freisler] and myself, for I could not utter many words – in which we two got to know each other through and through. Of the whole gang, Freisler was the only one who recognized me, and of the whole gang, he is the only one who knows why he has to kill me. We talked as if it were in a vacuum. He made not a single joke at my expense, as he had done with Delp and Eugen. No, this was grim earnest: “From whom do you take your orders? From the Beyond or Adolf Hitler? Who commands your loyalty and your faith?” All rhetorical questions of course. Anyhow, Freisler is the first National Socialist who has grasped who I am (von Moltke: 409).

Overall, Moltke’s last letter to his wife about the trial shows relief, gratitude, and joy. He recognized that in his trial Freisler had confessed to the incompatibility that the regime had always been at pains to conceal, but now the hostility manifested in the open. He continues:

Was it clear what he had said there? Just think how wonderfully God prepared this unworthy vessel . . . [H]e humbled me as a great landowner as I have never been humbled before, so that I had to lose all pride, so that at last I understand my sinfulness after 38 years, so that I had to learn to beg for forgiveness and to trust in his mercy . . . Then he lets me talk with Eugen and Delp and clarify things . . . and then your husband is chosen, as a Protestant, to be above all attacked and condemned for his friendship with Catholics, and therefore he stands before Freisler not as a Protestant, not as a big landowner, not as a nobleman, not as a German – all things were explicitly excluded in the trial . . . but as a Christian and nothing else (von Moltke: 410).

Delp and Moltke’s dialogue of ecumenism led to a united witness against National Socialism. Their testimony was nothing other than the lived communion of Christians with Jesus Christ. The communal truth of Christ came to light in their suffering and trial, and their shared martyrdom is a poignant, radical expression of that communion. On January 23, 1945, Moltke was executed. Delp was executed on February 2, 1945.

### **The Human Experience of Universal Truth and the Inclusiveness of Others**

Delp and Moltke’s martyrdom manifest what John Paul II would say is a graced truth at work at the local level leading people toward a catholicity in Christ. Here, this essay ends by drawing from Balthasar’s theology of truth to highlight how Delp and Moltke witnessed truth together.

According to Balthasar, the process of knowing the divine truth is primarily God’s loving self-communication in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of praying persons. The

divine initiative inspires the dialogue wherein the reception of Christ brings forth a disposition of gratitude and a response to God's gift of himself. That said, the truth of Christ is not the property of the knowing subject. Instead, the truth of Christ remains a gifted encounter (2005: 10-12). The essence of this giving and receiving of truth is grounded in love; love is what makes knowing the truth in Christ possible. This love that calls for a reciprocal gift of self to the divine and human other is the way that we come to know the truth about who we are and to become whom we are meant to be.

In light of Balthasar's theology, the believer's rejoinder of love that returns God's gift of self is an abandonment of self upon God's mercy because it is God who draws the human search for truth into the depths of trust and faith. Balthasar writes, "On the one hand truth produces definitive certainty, insofar as it puts an end to the tentative groping to know what is but . . . on the other hand, this closure awakens trust and faith and, in doing, always opens the way to eternal seeking" (2000: 227). That search is one which goes into the depths of God's inexhaustible mystery (2000: 240). The themes of prayerful trust in God and with one another as they were being guided into a mystery pervade one of Moltke's last letter:

I want to say the following: God has led us here marvelously. He also showed us in the last couple of months in human relationships the places that he could make favorable twists and turns. He showed that he is with us. And he can make good for us at the gallows. One thing, however, is certain, we must, without ceasing, dare to pray. Who can know, to which all this is necessary in the plan of the Lord? For us only one thing is valid: to commit ourselves joyfully in his guidance, even if we must go into the dark and are not able to see the path before us (Delp: 435-36).

What is of crucial importance is the communal dimension of the relationship with God because to be saved by Christ means to enter into his offering of himself for the salvation of the world (Healy: 208-9). In this communal reality, Delp and Moltke found their full truth together in God. So, it is through prayer and self-offering of their lives that we can see the other in their truth – a truth which is in Christ – and to perceive the truth that links another with oneself in a universally, shared humanity. Hence, the Kreisau Circle worked towards a new Germany based on Christian values. When the members were imprisoned, their cooperation deepened into a spiritual union. They were tried as conspirators but were condemned as Christians.

They recognize that their search for truth is rooted in a dialogue of conversion. Writing to his wife Freya before his execution, Moltke revealed the impact Delp had on him by humorously acknowledging that he was dying "as a martyr for St. Ignatius of Loyola" (404). This line evokes the fruits of earnest dialogue. As mentioned, the search for truth is a not solipsistic happening, but instead leads to persons collaborating to reveal shared values and a solidarity among people. For Delp and Moltke, it is the recognition and reception of God's love in prayer that impels them to a communion. In prayer, they encountered both a centrifugal and centripetal force, drawing them deeper into the divine truth, the source of all life, and sending them out from that source back into the world – albeit towards their deaths.

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