

THE MINDS OF THE MARTYRS

selected by Joseph A. Munitiz

The experience of those persecuted for their faith in the present century finds echoes in the thoughts of those who were prepared to die for the faith in the sixteenth. Admittedly time shifts many of the props on the stage, and changes much of the vocabulary. Even so there seem to be eternal truths enshrined in their words.

Admonition to English Catholics¹

William Allen

Although not a martyr himself, Cardinal Allen, from his base in Douai, provided much of the inspiration for the priests setting off to work and die in England.

Our days cannot be many, because we be men: neither can it be either godly or worldly wisdom, for a remnant of three or four years and perchance not so many months, to hazard the loss of all eternity No martyrdom of what length or torment soever can be more grievous than a long sickness and a languishing death: and he that departeth upon the pillow hath as little ease as he that dieth upon the gallows, block, or butcher's knife. And our Master's death, both for pains and ignominy, passed both sorts, and all other kinds either of martyrs or malefactors. Let no tribulation then, no peril, no prison, no

¹ From *The Other Face: Catholic Life under Elizabeth I*, edited by Philip Caraman (London: Longmans, 1960), 80–81.



Cardinal William Allen

persecution, not life, no death separate us from the charity of God, and the society of our sweet Saviour's passions, by and for whose love we shall have the victory in all these conflicts. Nevertheless, if by God's suffering, for causes hidden unto us, any shrink (which Christ forbid) for fear of death, torments, or tribulations, from the fellowship of your happy confession and crowns prepared for the same ... be not scandalised or troubled thereat, but use such with all lenity, taking compassion of their infirmity, considering that yourselves also, or any of us all, may be tempted and overthrown with Peter, and by God's grace afterward repent and rise with him again, though it be perilous to presume thereon, many more following him in his fall and misery, than attaining to his martyrdom and mercy.

A Monologue by Stratocles, Disciple, in a Dialogue with Eubulus, Praeceptor ...²

Edmund Campion

Edmund Campion was the first of the English martyrs; before leaving for England on his fateful mission he taught in Prague, and there wrote several plays for the benefit of his pupils; this extract shows a man aware of the nature of martyrdom, yet full of playful humour.

Oft have I seen and heard, and oftener read,
The various torments and the monstrous pains
Which hangmen upon felons use to spend;
But, Lord, in sooth, there never was such cark,
No rack, no thumbscrew, nor no gallows-tree,
No torture of Mezence or Phalaris,
Could ever equal the racked student's toils.
They, sure, of mortals are the wretchedest,
So sad a people walks not the wide earth.
Full fifteen years and more, I think, have gone
Since first my father packed me off to school.
All the while learning, I know less than nothing!
A pretty joke—seven years in a single class!
Four forms I've worn out, simply sitting on 'em.
Our master Whippy was a whipping man:
Often I could not sit, so waled was I,
All my poor little carcass chopped about.
Each wall could tell its tale of wails and cries—
The blessed first-fruits of the scholar's life.

Causes of Comfort In Tribulation³

Robert Southwell

Southwell was perhaps the most gifted writer of all the English martyrs. He tries to spell out here in prose the rationale for facing with courage his own martyrdom.

² From Richard Simpson, *Edmund Campion: A Biography* (London: John Hodges, 1896), appendix 5, 504; he translated (from the Latin) this extract from papers preserved in the Stonyhurst Manuscripts.

³ Robert Southwell, *An Epistle of Comfort*, edited by Margaret Waugh (London: Burns and Oates, 1965).



Robert Southwell

I hope no man will blame me, if, for my own good and your comfort, I have taken upon me to address you, and enlarge on a few points which seem some of the principal motives for consolation to those that suffer in God's cause.

And first, it must needs be a great comfort to those that, either reclaimed from schism or heresy, or from a dissolute life to the constant profession of the Catholic faith, are, for that cause, persecuted by Satan and his instruments: for it is a very great sign that they are delivered out of his power, and accounted by him

as sheep of God's flock, seeing that otherwise he would never so heavily pursue them

The second cause why we should willingly suffer persecution is, that whom God loveth he chastiseth, and scourgeth every child that he receiveth. And not without cause doth God chasten his children in this life; for if they cannot be won with easier remedies, whom he seeth ready to run astray, he holdeth them back with the hand-bit of adversity, and hedgeth them in with the thorns of tribulation

And in the third place, one that understandeth the course of Christian behoof, cannot but think it a most comfortable thing to suffer adversity for a good cause; seeing that it is not only the livery and cognizance of Christ, but the very garment of royalty which he chose to wear in this life

The example of Christ and the title of Christian, are motives sufficiently forcible to make us suffer adversity: but were they not so, yet considering where we are, what state we stand in, and what dangers hang over us, together with our ordinary wants and

necessities, we shall find that our whole life is so necessarily joined with sorrows, that it should rather seem a madness to live in pleasure, than odious to live in pain

But suppose that the pleasures of this world were such as rather to invite us to comfort and joy, than to sorrow and patient sufferance; yet if we consider what our life hath been, what our sins are, and what punishments we have thereby deserved, we shall think that God deals most mildly with us, and rejoice in our troubles, when we reflect that they are allotted us in lieu of most intolerable chastisements

But, in the fourth place—to come to the principal drift of my discourse—what more forcible things can I set before your eyes, as motives to comfort you in your tribulation, than the cause of your persecution, the honour of your present estate, and the future reward of your patient and constant sufferance? And first, as to the cause that you defend—which is no less than the only true and Catholic religion. You defend that Church, which is avouched by all antiquity; confirmed by the blood of infinite martyrs; gainsayed by the heretics of all ages, and most undoubtedly approved by all concurring testimonies

Secondly, as concerning your state—how can that be otherwise than honourable, when your cause is so good; seeing the cause honoureth the combat, and assureth you of the final victory? Your adversaries are mighty, their force very great, their vantage not unknown, their malice experienced: but your captain hath always conquered, your cause hath been always in the end advanced, your predecessors never lost the field: wherefore, then, should you have less hope of the victory?

And a thousand times happy are you, whose persons are proofs, whose chains are pledges of your future immortality! A thousand times happy, I say, whose estate is both glorious here, and a sure way to an unspeakable glory hereafter! For though prisons be in themselves the folds of Satan, to harbour his lewd flock, yet when the cause ennobleth the name of prisoner, the prisoner abolishes the dishonour of the place. What thing of old more odious than the cross? What place more abhorred than the Mount of Calvary? What rooms more reproachful than the grates and dungeons of the Saints?—Yet now, what thing more honourable than the Holy Cross? What place more revered

than the aforesaid Mount? What sanctuaries more desired than the dungeons of the Saints? ...

And now, in the last place, for your comfort, I put you in mind of a most consoling thing, that, if you be put to death in this cause of the Catholic faith, your death is martyrdom, and your foil, victory. And therefore, seeing that die we must, let us embrace this happy occasion to pass over our mortal end with the reward of immortality; neither let us fear to be killed, who thereby are sure to be crowned

Neither let the violence of death, nor the multitude of torments affright us: we have but one life, and one only can we lose. Goliath was as much hurt by the little stone from David's sling, as Sampson by the weight of a whole house; and all those who stoned Stephen to death, took no more from him, than an ordinary sickness took from Lazarus, and doth daily take from us all

What greater pre-eminence is there in the Church of God, than that of a martyr? What more renowned dignity, than to die in this cause of the Catholic faith? And this crown do our greatest enemies set upon our heads, the glory whereof none can sufficiently know, but such as have proved the same

Oh, how unhappy are they that, for the saving of their goods, for credit, temporal authority, or such worldly respects, forsake these glorious and divine honours, and purchase a most lamentable and ignominious style! Indeed, what are they but the spoils of Christians, the weeds of the Church, and the ruins of religion? ...

How great the glory due unto martyrs in the next world, may be easily conjectured; for if their very dead bodies here on earth are so highly honoured, and had in such estimation, what may we think of the majesty of their souls in heaven? ...

Consider now, oh you that persecute us, what the harm is you do us; yea, to what titles and glory you prefer us, by putting us to death! You see, that when you condemn us, you crown us; when you spoil us, you enrich us. Our number encreaseth as often as you reap us: the blood of the Christian is the seed of the Church.

'Sweet Manacles, Coveted Noose'⁴*Luisa de Carvajal*

Luisa de Carvajal was a Spanish lady who dedicated her life to helping persecuted English Catholics and collecting the relics that remained of the executed martyrs. She was also a poet, fifty of whose works survive.

Sweet manacles, coveted noose
 trials now gone, victorious hour,
 delightful and glorious infamy,
 holocaust burnt in a thousand flames:
 tell me, Love, why has this fortunate fate
 gone so far away from me,
 and the pleasing and pleasurable chain
 changed into harsh freedom for me?
 Has it been, by chance, due to have wished
 that the wound of my pierced soul,
 with pain strong and beyond measure
 be neither helped nor cured
 and that, with the feeling augmented and alight,
 life be unbound to pure love?

***Instructions given to Fr Robert Persons and Fr Edmund Campion,
 Founders of the Mission to England, 1580⁵****Everard Mercurian*

The fourth General of the Society of Jesus—the first non-Spaniard—had been Provincial of the Belgian Province, and was well acquainted with English refugees in Leuven and the problems faced by Catholics; however, he long resisted the establishment of a Jesuit English Mission because of

⁴ From Glyn Redworth, *The She-Apostle: The Extraordinary Life and Death of Luisa de Carvajal* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 232–233; the translation of the poem is his, with acknowledgement of his debt to Elizabeth Rhodes, *This Tight Embrace: Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza (1566–1614)* (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 2000), and M. A. Rees, *The Writings of Doña Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, Catholic Missionary to James I's London* (Lewiston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 2003; he comments very favourably on the poetry of Doña Luisa, 59–61. Reprinted by kind permission of the translator and of Oxford University Press.

⁵ From L. Hicks, *Letters and Memorials of Father Robert Persons, S.J.*, volume 1 (London: Catholic Record Society, 1942), Latin 316–319; English translation 319–321. For the background, see Thomas M. McCoog, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England 1541–1588: 'Our Way of Proceeding'* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1996), 136–141. Italics and headings are used to highlight significant points.

'a concern that the mission would be misrepresented as a political enterprise; an anxiety that Jesuits on the mission would be unable to live according to the Society's Institute; and an apprehension that the absence of an ecclesiastical hierarchy would result in discord between the Jesuits and the secular clergy'.⁶ Eventually he gave way to insistent requests by Cardinal Allen, hoping that the falling-off of executions after February 1578 and a possible marriage between Elizabeth I and the Duke of Anjou presaged suspension of the penal laws. Unfortunately, Mercurian's worst fears were justified by later events.

Purpose

The object aimed at by this mission is, firstly, to *preserve*, if God is propitious, and to advance in the faith and in our Catholic religion, all who are found to be Catholics in England; and, secondly, to *bring back* to it whoever may have strayed from it either through ignorance or at the instigation of others. To perform this task, which is of its own nature laborious and is most difficult in that part of the world particularly, where they will be continually in the midst of enemies, and these too of outstanding talent, skill and malice, it behoves our men to be armed with *two weapons* especially: firstly, with *virtue* and piety out of the ordinary; and, secondly, with *prudence*.

Means

In order to preserve their virtue and piety, although it can be said in general that it is sufficient if they observe exactly the Society's mode of life so far as the conditions allow where they are stationed, yet their *chief aid* will be a *right intention*, and a combination of *distrust in them themselves* with a firm *confidence in God* to whom alone they can look for grace and light; and added to this a frequent and fervent *recourse to prayer and examination of conscience*,⁷ so that, being in closer union with God, they may draw spirit and strength more constantly from Him. The *prudence*, again, which is needed in this province, consists mainly

⁶ Thomas M. McCoog, 'Striking Fear in Heretical Hearts': Mercurian and British Religious Exiles', in *The Mercurian Project: Forming Jesuit Culture 1573–1580*, edited by Thomas M. McCoog (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), 660.

⁷ The twice-daily 'examen' is recommended in the Spiritual Exercises, and is a staple of Jesuit spirituality.

in knowing with whom, when, in what way and with what subjects they should deal. And about all these matters we are about to make certain recommendations below.

Conduct

Temperance in food, necessary everywhere, is especially so in places where, for the reason that many offend in that respect, those whose virtue in that matter is conspicuous will give greater edification. And accordingly, so far as is possible, convivial gatherings are to be avoided, and they should usually have their meals in private, except when the guests are such that there is clearly no danger to be feared. Just as remissness and tepidity commonly cause great harm in matters pertaining to the service of God, in the same way zeal and fervour, when immoderate, often hinder what otherwise might have been done for the honour of God. Much care must therefore be taken to proceed with great *skill and circumspection* in all their affairs. Though their *dress* must of necessity be that of laymen, yet it ought to be of a *modest and sober* kind, and to give no appearance of levity and vanity. They are not to be in possession, however, when they are permanently stationed, of clothes of the sort customary in the Society,⁸ unless it is evident that they can have them perfectly safely; and in that case they are only to be used for the purpose of holding services, hearing confessions and carrying out other duties of this kind.

Organization

If it is out of the question for them to live in community, let them at least take care *to visit one another* as often as possible and have intercourse, so that they may console one another and also help one another with advice and assistance, as has been the custom. Fr Robert will be *in charge* of all who are now being sent, until otherwise determined, and all are to obey him as they would ourselves. And, so that he may be the better able to give consolation to all in every event, we grant him all privileges, faculties etc. As to *what Province*, however, the whole mission should be attached⁹ and have recourse to when circumstances require it, they themselves will advise us, after

⁸ A reference to cassocks.

⁹ The Society custom is for a mission territory to be attached to a Province.

they have arrived there, which they judge to be the most convenient. If such progress is made that there is need of the help of *more labourers*, they are to write to me, not to any other member of the Society ...

Relations

As regards intercourse with strangers, this should at first be with the *upper classes* rather than with the common people [*cum nobilibus, quam cum plebeis*], both on account of the greater fruit to be gathered and because the former will be able to protect them against violence of all sorts. Then, in the case of Catholics, let it be with the reconciled rather than with schismatics; *with heretics* they should *have no direct dealings*; but they will urge the Catholics each and all to strive for the conversion of the members of his family, and to enable them to do so let them give them advice and equip them with arguments; and when they have begun to lose a little of their prejudice and to put away that fury and hatred which they had, so that they are ready to hear the truth with equanimity, then will our fathers be able—with due regard for safety, without letting it be known, however, that they are members of the Society—themselves to confirm their purpose and give them fuller instruction.

Controversy

If necessity forces them *to dispute with heretics*,¹⁰ they should refrain from biting and intemperate words and give evidence of their modesty and charity not less than of their learning, and let them make use of solid arguments in preference to bitter wrangling. And as it is a characteristic of heretics, when they are clearly beaten in argument, to be unwilling to give in to anybody, for this reason let them be slow to enter into conversation with them, either at festive gatherings or elsewhere, unless, by reason of those present, there is hope of great gain from it and unless also there is no danger of information being

¹⁰ Mercurian seems inspired here by the advice given by Ignatius to the Jesuits taking part in the Council of Trent: see *St Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, translated by Philip Endean and Joseph A. Munitiz (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), letter 14, 164–167. Cardinal Allen disagreed with Mercurian on the value of religious disputation, see Thomas M. McCoog, “Playing the Champion”: The Role of Disputation in the Jesuit Mission’, in *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits*, edited by Thomas M. McCoog (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2007), 139–163.

given against them; and that being so, let them be brief and avoid quarrels and altercations, in which the heretics will always have the best of them, and let them produce all their strongest arguments first, so as to get the upper hand from the very beginning.

Public Relations

Familiar conversation *with women*, even the best of them, as also *with boys*, will be a thing to be shunned,¹¹ thus preserving the decorum and gravity due to our state of life. In conversation they ought to be on their guard against garrulity; this is wont quickly to reveal a man's faults and render him contemptible, especially in the eyes of that nation.¹² They must be very careful not to give rise to any, even the slightest, suspicion of avarice and greed; and to this end, unless the need is pressing, they are *not to ask or accept alms*. And if it should be necessary, it is better to accept it from one or two loyal and tried men. Finally let them bear themselves in such a way that all can see that their sole purpose is the gain of souls.

Secrecy

They are *to take in with them* none of those articles which have been proscribed under *pain of death*, such as *Agnus Dei*,¹³ blessed grains,¹⁴ etc.; nor will they keep them on their persons henceforward; this same prudence they will also observe in carrying *letters* about with them, looking carefully to what letters they carry and to whom. They are *to let no one know* that they are priests, still less that they are members of the Society, unless great hope of profit should demand it in order to give glory to God and gain a notable harvest of souls. And for the same reason, even on their journey, they will let this mission of theirs be known as little as possible, either to ours or to strangers.

¹¹ This was standard advice at the time.

¹² A remark that may stem from Mercurian's personal contacts with the English refugees.

¹³ Curiously enough an *Agnus Dei* (a wax disk inscribed with an image of the Lamb of God) was found in the twentieth century hidden in the attic of the house, Lyford Grange, where Edmund Campion had been captured in 1581, and is usually said to have belonged to him. It can be seen in Campion Hall, Oxford, and is reproduced overleaf.

¹⁴ Ignatius himself was known to have a great devotion to 'sacramentals' like these, both sending them as gifts and keeping some in his room (Giovanni Pietro Maffei, *De vita et moribus Ignatii Loiolae*, [Rome, 1585], 114).

Politics

They are not to mix themselves in *the affairs of States*, nor should they recount news about political matters in their letters to this place (Rome), or to that (England); and there also they are *to refrain from talk* against the Queen¹⁵ and not allow it in others. If any of them send *reports* here for submission to the illustrious Cardinal Protector and His Holiness, either to inform him of their circumstances and the progress of their business, or to ask for some favour, let them see to it that what they write is not only true and undeniable, but also presented in a style that is grave and prudent as well as being clear. And should it be necessary to draw attention to mistakes or faults committed by someone or to the remedies these require, let it be done in a *separate letter*, not omitting to give the views of the consultors. They will let us know the safest way we can use for sending letters, giving us the names of the persons and places to whom they would have them addressed; and for this purpose ciphers are useful, and they will be supplied here for use when necessary.



The Lyford Agnus Dei

¹⁵ Elizabeth I, excommunicated by Pope Pius V in 1570.