

# Central LOBBY

WAR AND PEACE

CENTRAL LOBBY



**The Bishop of Coventry** reflects on the troubled history of his diocese and its lessons for the future

**T**he remarkable structures of Coventry Cathedral, part medieval ruin and part modernist edifice, speak to the world about the horror of war, the possibilities of peace and the long road to reconciliation. They shape the way I try to act in the various spheres in which I find myself, Parliament included.

I carry with me the two radical challenges that rose in defiance of the bombs that destroyed the Cathedral in 1940. The first has to do with reaching out to those from whom we are estranged, those history has made different from us and those we have allowed to become our enemies. The second is encapsulated in two words that the Provost of the time etched onto the ruined walls of the Cathedral, 'Father, forgive'. Not 'Father, forgive them', but forgive us all for our part in the world's evil. I call it the Coventry confession of complicity.

**“ The Coventry story has made me lose confidence in violence as a solution to the world's problems ”**

The Coventry story plays out in three areas in my parliamentary work. The first concerns the past. When you stand with the people of Coventry and Dresden as they mourn their dead today, you realise that the road to reconciliation is still being travelled. The commemorations of the First World War shared by our Prime Minister and the German president took us further, but there is still some way to go. 2015's 70th



anniversary of the bombing of Dresden, along with other German cities, and the end of the war itself represents one of the last chances for our government to heal the wounds of history with the survivors still present. I hope it will be taken.

The second area concerns conflict in the present. The Coventry story has made me lose confidence in violence as a solution to the world's problems. Resisting evil by restraining it in order to protect the vulnerable is necessary, but the ways of peace require methods more sophisticated than bombs and bullets. These need to be pursued aggressively, with relentless determination. At some point, they involve reaching out to enemies and the costly questioning of causes.

The third area involves both present and future. It is the cause of freedom of religion and belief. The death of Jesus reminds us how brutal power can be when used to suppress the perceived threat of religious dissent, and that states do not always preserve and promote

the freedom to practice one's faith. All religions, my own included, must be ready to confess complicity and guard against any manipulation – religious, cultural or national – that denies the dignity of humanity that our deepest principles proclaim. For the sake of that dignity, and to ensure that the seedbed of society does not allow the injustice that sets community against community to take root, states must embed in their own laws the right to this vital human freedom enshrined in international law. The APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief is doing excellent work on the responsibility of states and their citizens (see [freedomdeclared.org](http://freedomdeclared.org)). It is up to religious leaders to ensure our faith communities are bearers of reconciliation and that we stand together to defend each other's God-given freedoms. 🇬🇧

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