

Sacred and Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland since 1914

John Wolffe



B L O O M S B U R Y

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Preface

This book is a somewhat delayed outcome of a Research Councils UK Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellowship that I held between 2013 and 2015. The fellowship had a dual purpose, to support original research and to facilitate wider leadership activities that, in particular, brought academics into dialogue with ‘non-academic’ stakeholders to advance impact and public engagement. A central focus of my leadership activities was to highlight the importance of academically informed religious literacy for shaping public policy, for ensuring accurate reporting of religious issues in the media, for counteracting prejudice and stereotyping, and for challenging distorted and problematic interpretations of religious traditions themselves.

This book aims further to serve that overall purpose through providing objective academic analysis of a particular problem that has long both fascinated and disturbed me. A crucial aspect of religious literacy is the ability to understand the complex and often contested interface between the sacred and the secular, which is brought into particularly sharp focus by the question of martyrdom. Present-day concerns around the martyrdom claims of suicide terrorists, needed, it seemed to me, to be set in a historical and comparative perspective. This is the task that, primarily within the compass of Britain and Ireland, this book seeks to fulfil.

Like every author, I have incurred many debts. Above all, I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council for jointly funding the fellowship that made the underlying research possible. Gavin Moorhead, research associate at The Open University, and Neil Jarman and John Bell, collaborators at the Institute for Conflict Research in Belfast, have been invaluable colleagues, especially in conducting the interviews that enabled the analysis of recent views in the second half of Chapter 6. I am also most grateful to the many anonymous individuals who agreed to be interviewed and contributed most valuable insights. My debts to the patient and often unseen work of libraries and archives are manifold, but I would particularly highlight the Open University Library, the British Library, Lambeth Palace Library, the Linen Hall Library, the National Archives, the National Library of Ireland and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. I have benefited greatly from feedback from participants at seminars and conferences when I presented early versions of the work, but more especially from the assistance of Philip Williamson, who generously shared his as yet unpublished transcripts of material relating to Remembrance Sunday, and from that of Alan Ford, Neil Jarman, Philip Williamson and anonymous publishers’ readers who made very helpful suggestions on later drafts. My mother, Mary Wolffe, also kindly read the full draft text, and made valuable comments combining the perspective of a trained historian with that of someone who has lived through over ninety years of the period under examination. As

always, I am indebted to my wife, Helen, and my son, David, for their love, support and tolerance of my particular academic preoccupations.

Earlier versions of some passages in Chapter 1 were previously published in ‘The Mutations of Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland c.1850–1920’, in James Kelly and Mary Ann Lyons, eds, *Death and Dying in Ireland, Britain and Europe: Historical Perspectives* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2013), 349–68, and some from Chapter 2 in ‘Forever England beneath the Cross of Sacrifice: Christianity and National Identity in British First World War Cemeteries’, in John Carter Wood, ed., *Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Europe: Conflict, Community and the Social Order* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2016), 53–72.

April 2019

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
BMH	Irish National Archives, Bureau of Military History
CTS	Catholic Truth Society
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library
NIPC	Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library
NLI	National Library of Ireland
NMA	National Memorial Arboretum
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
RMCU	Royal Martyr Church Union
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
WDA	Westminster Diocesan Archives
WGC	Imperial/Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Varieties of martyrdom

Exploring sacred and secular martyrdoms

In late 1914, responding to heavy British casualties in the opening battles of the First World War, the bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-Ingram, sought to console bereaved families:

You have lost your boys, but what are they? Martyrs – martyrs as really as St Stephen was a martyr – martyrs dying for their faith as really as St Stephen, the first martyr, died for his. They looked up when they died in the trenches, or in the little cottage where they were carried, they looked up and they saw JESUS standing on the right hand of GOD. And he is keeping them safe for you there when the time comes. Covered with imperishable glory they pass to deathless life.¹

Winnington-Ingram's equation of dead soldiers with Stephen, the archetype of Christian martyrdom, is an apt starting point for this book, which seeks to explore the uses and ambiguities of the concept during the century since 1914.

Stephen's martyrdom is described in some detail in the New Testament book of Acts (6:8–7:60). His preaching in Jerusalem about Jesus of Nazareth is 'full of grace and power' and leads to his arrest and trial by the Jewish Sanhedrin on a charge of blasphemy. Far from denying the allegation, Stephen delivers a provocative speech, offering his own reading of Jewish history and culminating with the charge that his hearers 'always resist the Holy Spirit', and that they were responsible for betraying and murdering Jesus, 'the Righteous One'. Stephen then declares that he sees heaven opened and 'the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God', which is the last straw for his enemies, who refuse to listen further to him, drive him out of the city and stone him to death. Meanwhile Stephen prays that Jesus will receive his spirit and not hold the sin of his persecutors against them.

This account highlights a number of features of Stephen's case that led to it readily becoming a model for subsequent narratives of Christian martyrdom. First, Stephen is fearless and consistent in his witness to Jesus: indeed, the very word 'martyr' derives from the Greek *martus*, meaning a witness.² Second, although verbally provocative, he is physically passive: he does not violently resist his persecutors or to incite others to do so. Indeed, he prays that those who are stoning him will be forgiven. Third, he dies

in a state of religious ecstasy, confident that his spirit will be received by the Jesus to whom he testifies. Finally, implicit in the account is a sense that even if Stephen does not deliberately seek martyrdom, he makes no attempt to escape it and appears even to welcome it.

It is clear that Winnington-Ingram's equation of fallen soldiers with Stephen stretches this concept of martyrdom substantially. First, Great War soldiers were not in general explicit witnesses to Christianity, and even the minority who were actively professing Christians died not because of their faith, but because they were taking part in a war against other Christian nations. Second, a soldier is an active combatant rather than a passive victim. Third, the brutal reality of death on the battlefield was in most cases far removed from the peaceful ecstatic experience that Winnington-Ingram visualized. Finally, while a soldier may well contemplate the possibility of death, he does not normally welcome it, and as he serves under orders, his sacrifice is likely to be involuntary rather than in any sense a matter of personal choice.

Ninety years later, as Mohammad Sidique Khan prepared to blow himself and others up on the London Underground on 7 July 2005, he recorded a video in which he represented his action as standing in a tradition of Islamic martyrdom:

Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood ...

Our religion is Islam – obedience to the one true God, Allah, and following the footsteps of the final prophet and messenger Muhammad This is how our ethical stances are dictated.

Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetrate atrocities against my people all over the world. ...

We are at war and I am a soldier ...

I myself, I myself, I make dua to Allah ... to raise me amongst those whom I love like the prophets, the messengers, the martyrs and today's heroes ...

With this I leave you to make up your own minds and I ask you to make dua to Allah almighty to accept the work from me and my brothers and enter us into gardens of paradise.³

While Sidique Khan thus claimed an Islamic legitimacy for his actions, in reality they also extended the boundaries of a traditional religious martyrdom, in a manner that was repugnant to the great majority of his own co-religionists. Although an Islamic concept of martyrdom contrasts with a Christian one by more positively affirming the case of a soldier who dies in active combat in defence of the faith, it is questionable whether it legitimizes suicide attacks, and it certainly does not justify the intentional mass murder of civilians.⁴ Nevertheless, in his own eyes, and in the eyes of his radical Islamist sympathizers, Sidique Khan was a martyr.

These two examples serve to introduce the complex and contested nature of the concept of martyrdom over the last century, which is the subject of this book. It is primarily a work of empirical history and hence does not seek to impose a single definition of martyrdom, but rather to identify and trace the ways in which the concept has been employed, both explicitly and also implicitly in more diffuse language of sacrifice. Central to the argument will be the presentation of martyrdom

as both a religious phenomenon – rooted in particular in the teachings and traditions of both Christianity and Islam – and a secular one – rooted above all in nationalism as well as in other political ideologies. As the two quotations above well illustrate, however, the sacred and the secular often operate in complex interaction with each other: Winnington-Ingram's words gave a Christian colour to an essentially nationalistic view of martyrdom; Sidique Khan claimed Islamic legitimacy for a particular violent politicized interpretation of the teachings of his faith.

There are revealing asymmetries in the academic literature between the treatment of martyrdom in Christianity and Islam. There is longstanding interest in Christian martyrdom treated predominantly as a historical phenomenon, concentrated particularly in the early centuries of the church⁵ and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶ In the early period, Christian martyrs suffered primarily at the hands of the Roman authorities; in the era of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, however, they were primarily victims of other Christians. Martyr cults are thus seen as having a formative role both in the emergence of Christianity itself and in the shaping of the rival Protestant and Catholic traditions that emerged from the fracturing of Western Christendom in the sixteenth century. More recent contributions, however, have drawn out the fluidity and variability of constructions of martyrdom across time and space both in early Christianity and in the Reformation era.⁷

While Christian martyrdom in other periods has received less-intensive attention it has not been neglected. The dominance of Christianity in most parts of medieval Europe rendered martyrdom at the hands of non-Christians an unusual occurrence. Indeed the church, while fostering the continuing cults of early Christian martyrs, appeared reluctant to recognize more contemporary instances. Nevertheless, attention has been drawn to more isolated medieval instances, such as the Christians who were martyred when they deliberately confronted Islam in ninth-century Córdoba⁸ and the cult of William of Norwich, a boy allegedly murdered by Jews in 1144. Moreover, endeavours to suppress later medieval heresies, such as the Cathars, Hussites, Lollards and Waldensians, led to numerous deaths that foreshadowed the intra-Christian martyrdoms of the Reformation era.⁹

Once the intense religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had given way to the relative toleration of the eighteenth century, minorities such as British Catholics and French Huguenots continued to be oppressed but were not normally martyred. However, in the 1790s, the French Revolution initiated a new era in which Catholics were persecuted under a secular republican regime. Ivan Gobry estimates that at least 100,000 people, both clergy and laity, died under conditions consistent with describing them as martyrs, although he was only able to document 4,600 of them.¹⁰ The upsurge of Christian missions outside Europe in the nineteenth century also led to perceived martyrdoms, although attention to cases such as that of Bishop Patteson, killed in Melanesia in 1872, and the young indigenous converts executed by King Mwanga of Buganda in 1886, has been episodic rather than systematic.¹¹ The same is true of Christian martyrdom in the twentieth century and the contemporary world, which has attracted relatively little scholarly attention, apart from those who suffered in the Soviet Union and the individual case of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed by the Nazis in 1945.¹² However, as David Killingray argued in 1993 with particular

reference to Africa, 'there is a good case for regarding the twentieth century as the century of Christian persecution and martyrdom,' a view that is supported by a substantial devotional and popular literature. Indeed, the ongoing energetic activities of a number of charities, such as Open Doors in Britain and the Voice of the Martyrs in the United States, highlight continuing persecution of Christians and indicate that actual martyrdoms have remained widespread in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.¹³

By contrast, academic attention to Muslim martyrdom has only developed substantially during the last twenty years and has focused primarily on the present day and the recent past, despite the fact that Islam too has a very long history of martyrdom, at least back to the death of Hussain and his companions at Karbala in 680 CE. This contemporary upsurge of interest is largely attributable to the perception that Muslim beliefs about martyrdom are seriously problematic in giving rise to the suicide attacks that, since the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, have stirred profound anxieties in the West. Whereas studies of Christian martyrdom have been primarily the work of theologians and historians, initial analysis of Islamic martyrdom in the aftermath of 9/11 was predominantly rooted in the social sciences, and hence, while it offered a rich awareness of contemporary social and political context, it lacked detailed historical or theological perspective.¹⁴

Subsequent publications, however, have developed more subtle analysis of Islamic ideas and their implications. In his *Martyrdom in Islam*, David Cook demonstrated the complexity and variety of earlier Muslim views of martyrdom and hence that contemporary radical Islamist understandings rest on a selective reading of their own tradition.¹⁵ An important collection of essays, published in 2009, brought research on violence and martyrdom in Islam into dialogue with analysis of comparable dimensions of other religious traditions, thereby pointing up commonalities and distinctive features.¹⁶ Most recently, a major project on Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence in Islamic Thought, led by Robert Gleave, has generated further in-depth analysis spanning the longue durée history of Islam.¹⁷

Analysis that encompasses both Christianity and Islam points up significant similarities and contrasts. The Arabic noun *shahid*, used of Muslim martyrs, has the same root meaning, a witness, as the Greek *martus*.¹⁸ That is the sense in which the word is used in the Qu'ran. Muslim martyrs, like Christian ones, are perceived as testifying to their faith by the manner of their life as well as by the manner of their deaths. The notion of sacrifice, emulating the redemptive sacrifice of Christ himself on the cross, which is central to a Christian concept of martyrdom, also has its parallels in Shi'a Muslim identification with the martyrdom of Hussain. Shi'as indeed have historically had a substantially stronger cult of martyrdom than Sunnis, which manifested itself in recent times in the Iran–Iraq war of 1980–8 when Iranians venerated casualties as martyrs. However, for Sunnis, who make up 85 per cent of the world's Muslim population, the notion of passive sacrifice, with its Christian resonances, is unattractive.¹⁹ Their concept of martyrdom is grounded rather in the cause of active *jihad*, which means striving to promote the faith. The concept of *jihad* is a broad one, incorporating the believer's inner spiritual struggles and peaceful endeavours to promote Islam as well as armed conflict. However, whereas the characteristic Christian martyr is, like Stephen

and Jesus himself, the passive victim of the violence of others, the characteristic Muslim martyr dies in active combat. As Brian Wicker puts it,

Christian teaching is quite emphatic: you cannot be recognized as a martyr if your death comes about simply as a result of participation in war, even in a just war ...

On the other hand, for Muslims dying in the course of armed conflict 'in the way of God' (with all the restrictions this imposes) in defence of Islam against its enemies can well count as martyrdom.²⁰

However, the emergence from the late eighteenth century onwards of forms of secular martyrdom in historically Christian cultures caused that contrast to become blurred in practice. The concept of secular martyrdom denotes a death as a consequence of commitment to a non-religious political or national cause. However, cases that are exclusively secular without any religious dimension are in fact quite rare. The best examples occurred in the immediate aftermath of the French and Russian Revolutions. While those who died in the attack on the Bastille in July 1789 were commemorated as martyrs in conventionally Catholic terms,²¹ by 1793 the Revolution was in conflict with the church. Hence, during the Terror a number of individuals who died at the hands of counter-revolutionaries were identified as 'Martyrs of Liberty', above all the journalist Jean-Paul Marat, whose assassination in his bath depicted by Jacques-Louis David became one of the iconic images of the Revolution. Their funerals were elaborate spectacles in the streets of Paris, and their engraved images were circulated around the country. It is true that these secular martyrdoms appropriated some of the outward language and forms of the very Catholicism they rejected but, as Avner Ben-Amos argues, 'the new cult was an expression of a transfer of the sacred from the Church to the Revolution, its ideals, symbols and representatives'.²² Similarly, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, the nascent Communist regime portrayed M. S. Uritskii, chief of the Petrograd (St Petersburg) secret police, as a martyr following his assassination in September 1918. The cult of Lenin himself also acquired similar characteristics, stimulated by his wounding in an assassination attempt also in 1918 and his premature death in 1924, presented as a sacrifice of himself 'in the interests of the working people'.²³

More commonly, however, martyrdoms for secular causes manifested aspects of Christian motivation or at least of Christian language. This point is well exemplified by the two most prominent political martyrdoms of the era of the American Civil War, those of John Brown and Abraham Lincoln. Neither was an orthodox Christian and their deaths were in the causes of slavery abolition and American liberty rather than of religion, but both used profoundly religious language and were characterized by others as Christlike in their suffering.²⁴ It was Lincoln, too, who in the Gettysburg Address gave supremely eloquent expression to the idea that war dead 'gave their lives that that nation might live', a sentiment that despite its secular national context has strong biblical resonances, with verses such as John 3:16 and John 15:13. José Rizal, the Filipino nationalist leader executed by the Spanish colonial authorities in 1896, was a robust critic of priestly abuses but remained a practising Catholic motivated by his understanding of Christian faith. His last words before he was shot by firing squad

were probably a conscious echo of those of Christ on the cross, '*consummatum est*' (it is finished).²⁵ Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968 because of his leadership of the campaign for black civil rights, but his motivation was rooted in Christianity, highlighted by the coincidence of his death after delivering a speech comparing himself to Moses on the mountaintop looking over the promised land.²⁶

A recent collection of essays on secular martyrdom in Britain and Ireland edited by Quentin Outram and Keith Laybourn complements the emphasis of the present book on the war dead and nationalism, by focusing on the 'people's martyrology', which they argue, has helped to shape labour and radical politics from the early nineteenth century onwards.²⁷ As they point out, the anthem of the labour movement is explicit in its reference to martyrdom:

The people's flag is deepest red,
It shrouded oft our martyred dead
And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold,
Their hearts' blood dyed its every fold.

So raise the scarlet standard high,
Beneath its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

The specific cases discussed in the book include the 'Peterloo Massacre' of 1819, the 'Featherstone Massacre' of 1893, the Tonypandy riots of 1910, the 'martyrdom' of the town of Jarrow in the 1930s and the killing of David Oluwale in 1969. Outram and Laybourn also emphasize the Christian roots of the concept, particularly apparent in two of their other case studies, Emily Wilding Davison and the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs'. Davison received fatal injuries at the Epsom Derby in 1913 as she stepped in front of the king's horse as a demonstration in support of votes for women. Davison's conviction of the fundamental equality of men and women was grounded in her belief in 'real Christianity', and she had written that 'to re-enact the tragedy of Calvary for generations yet unborn, that is the last consummate sacrifice of the Militant'. After her death the suffragette movement freely applied the language of Christian martyrdom.²⁸ Christian influence was also strongly apparent in the most prominent case of the word being applied to individuals who suffered for a cause but did not die for it, that of the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' sentenced in 1834 to transportation to Australia for forming a trade union. Indeed, it was Methodists who first gave currency to the description of the Dorset labourers as 'martyrs'.²⁹

The criteria for Catholic martyrdom set out by Pope Benedict XIV in the mid-eighteenth century have been followed by some scholars who have more or less explicitly rejected the concept of secular martyrdom, insisting that martyrdom, by definition, is a religious act.³⁰ Lacey Baldwin Smith goes further, arguing that in the twentieth century boundaries became so confused that it may cease to be meaningful to speak of martyrs at all. He develops this case with particular reference to Bonhoeffer, who, he points out, although venerated as a Christian martyr, was actually executed not

because of his faith but because he was involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler.³¹ Such an approach, however, would also potentially exclude many religiously recognized martyrs from earlier periods: the Romans executed Christians because their refusal to worship the emperor called their loyalty into question; under Elizabeth I of England, Catholic priests were executed because they were believed, sometimes with good reason, to be implicated in conspiracies to assassinate or depose her. Conversely, as Joyce Pettigrew points out, primarily political martyrdoms, such as Palestinian suicide attacks on Israel, can be transformed 'through the medium of religious tradition'.³²

In this book, I accordingly do not attempt to make a firm conceptual distinction between religious and non-religious martyrdoms, but rather envisage a wide spectrum of mixed motives and contexts. Indeed, the very terms used in the title, 'sacred' and 'secular', carry their own mixed resonances for scholars. For example, Matthew Francis has argued that 'sacred' is a useful concept for designating non-negotiable beliefs that can be non-religious as well as religious.³³ Conversely, Kate Cooper has pointed out that 'Augustine is the originator of the idea of the secular as an arena in which a social boundary is imposed on theological judgement':³⁴ many religious martyrdoms can be seen as, among other things, assertions of that principle in the face of a theocratic or confessional state. Moreover, as Talal Asad argues, whatever formal distinctions may be in place, in practice 'objects, sites, practices, representations ... cannot be confined within the exclusive space of what secularists *name* "religion"'.³⁵

This book touches on a variety of manifestations of secular martyrdom, but focuses on nationalism in Britain and Ireland through exploring the cult of fallen soldiers from the First World War onwards, and the veneration of those who died in the cause of Irish nationalism and republicanism. The inclusion of dead soldiers in a book on martyrdom extends the concept beyond those who explicitly gave their lives for a particular religious or ideological cause: their sacrifice was, in most cases, an inarticulate and involuntary one. The contemporary construction of the fallen as martyrs will be discussed further in the next chapter: for now, however, it is relevant to note Stuart Wright's argument that warfare of itself generates a polarized frame of mind among combatants that demonizes the enemy in order to justify killing him, even at the expense of sacrificing one's own life.³⁶ Such an attitude was above all apparent in the First World War, widely, if perversely, regarded as a holy war.³⁷ Although there is now a significant literature on the commemoration of the British war dead,³⁸ 'historians of religion have been surprisingly slow to consider [war] memorials'.³⁹ Although explicit claims that dead soldiers were martyrs were rare, as we shall see implicit association was widespread and the language and symbolism of self-sacrifice were pervasive.

A parallel point can be made about the rich academic literature on commemoration and memory in Ireland, which only makes limited connections to religion, an omission that is all the more surprising in the light of the persistence of high levels of Christian practice for most of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ While a number of scholars have commented on the language of political martyrdom in Irish republicanism, particularly in examining the background to the 1981 hunger strikes, the relationship of this tradition to contemporary religious views of martyrdom remains largely unexplored.⁴¹ In this book I seek, among other things, to respond to the challenge set by Alan Ford in concluding his analysis of martyrdom in early modern Ireland 'to

unpick the continuities and discontinuities between the willingness to die for Christ and the tradition of dying for Ireland'. As Ford points out, such an analysis 'requires closer investigation of the extent to which the parallel streams of religious hagiography and political martyrdom actually met and influenced each other, whether in Dublin in 1916, or in the H-blocks in 1981'.⁴² The question he poses in a specifically Irish context has an application far beyond the shores of Ireland: it lies at the heart of what this book is about.

In its focus on Britain and Ireland over the century since 1914, this book will inevitably offer more extensive analysis of Christian and culturally Christian martyrdom than of Islamic martyrdom, as only during the last twenty years did Islamic martyrdom become a prominent issue in these islands. Nevertheless, the material to be presented here provides an important and hitherto neglected comparative context for assessment of Islamic martyrdom. It will be argued that it is precisely by bringing more secular dimensions of martyrdom into the discussion that we shall develop a basis for better understanding the contemporary mutation of the tradition of Islamic martyrdom into a creed that legitimates suicide attacks.

In summary, the argument will be developed as follows. The second half of the present chapter will explore the immediate historical background to the period after 1914 tracing a growing convergence between categories of sacred and secular martyrdom. Chapter 2 then examines the commemoration of the dead of the First World War. It will be argued that the Cross of Sacrifice, the ubiquitous central feature of British war cemeteries, symbolized a widespread association between death in the conflict and Christian perceptions of martyrdom. Such linkages were also apparent in other forms of commemoration, especially the interment of the Unknown Warrior in November 1920 and the design and texts of war memorials. Such connections, however, were problematic in some quarters: care was taken to accommodate the sensibilities of religious minorities, while the somewhat different trajectories of commemoration in Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as on the continent and in other parts of the British Empire, serve to highlight the distinctive features of the English case.

Chapter 3 examines the inter-war period, which saw significant revivals of the cults of both Catholic and Protestant martyrs of the Reformation era, including that of King Charles I. Although the associated literature was primarily devotional in character, it also had a significant secular dimension, which rooted particular constructions of national (including Scottish and Welsh) and local identity in the sacrifices of the victims of historic persecution. By contrast, martyr narratives concerned with overseas missions did not normally endorse secular imperialism, and attention to Westerners was balanced by sympathetic treatment of the martyrdoms of indigenous converts. Meanwhile, the term 'martyr' was also applied in more specifically political contexts, for example, in the centenary of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1934, and with reference to the victims of fascism on the continent.

Chapter 4 turns attention to the Irish case, framing the analysis by reference to two events that immediately evoke the close interweaving of nationalism and Christian reference, the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. It traces the history of martyrdom reference in the republican political tradition from the aftermath of the Easter Rising to the hunger strikes of 1981 and the other casualties of

the Northern Ireland Troubles. While the Catholic Church did not officially endorse such martyrdoms, for much of the period both the pronouncements of individual sympathetic clergy and expressions of popular piety implied a close affinity. Moreover, the cult of Oliver Plunkett (martyred in 1681) made explicit links between nationalism and the defence of the faith. There are significant parallels with the Protestant and Unionist tradition commemorating the sacrifice of the Ulster Division on the Somme in 1916, although significantly, this does not generally use the actual term 'martyr'. In the later twentieth century, however, these traditions began to be reinterpreted in more conciliatory frameworks, with Oliver Plunkett presented as an ecumenical figure, and the First World War as an all-Ireland rather than exclusively Ulster sacrifice. These trends were further stimulated by widespread revulsion against the Enniskillen Remembrance Sunday bombing of 1987, the victims of which crucially came to be associated with the cause of peace rather than that of the British militarism that the IRA had intended to attack.

Chapter 5 explores trends in Britain from the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 to the Falklands War of 1982. Although churchmen were now much more circumspect than some of them had been in applying to the war dead language redolent of martyrdom, they were unable entirely to resist contrary pressure from political and military leaders and from public opinion. Meanwhile, interest in distinctively Christian martyrdom revived and, alongside the Catholic campaign for the canonization of English recusant martyrs, acquired an increasingly internationalist tone. The consequent tensions are explored through examination of the history of Remembrance Sunday and the controversy that arose over the content of the service in St Paul's Cathedral that marked the end of the Falklands War.

Chapter 6 analyses the trajectories of both sacred and secular martyrdom traditions since the 1980s. While there was renewed Christian awareness of sacred martyrdom and a revival of the commemoration of war dead, the language of secular martyrdom largely disappeared. From the turn of the millennium onwards, however, the advent of suicide terrorist attacks in the West added a new dimension: depending on one's point of view both the perpetrators and the victims could be seen as martyrs. These issues are further explored through a series of interviews conducted in both England and Ireland between 2012 and 2014. Chapter 7 then draws threads together in relation particularly to the history of secularization, nationalism and memory.

Martyrdom in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

The preceding survey of the literature has indicated some overall contexts for understanding martyrdom, but this section provides more immediate background for the rest of the book by exploring evolving perceptions of martyrdom in Britain and Ireland in the century or so before 1914.

Once the immediate impact of the French Revolution receded, the dominant early-nineteenth-century perception of martyrdom drew on a revived awareness of the persecution of the Reformation era, fuelled by a renewed sense of contemporary

competition between Protestantism and Catholicism, in both its Anglican and Roman forms. This led, in particular, to an upsurge in republication of John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (usually titled as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*), the classic Elizabethan work graphically describing the persecutions of Protestants under Mary I as the culmination of the history of Christian martyrdom. The British Library catalogue lists no less than ten editions appearing between the late 1830s and the 1870s ranging from a massive eight-volume scholarly text edited by Stephen Cattley and George Townsend to pocket-sized abridgements.⁴³ In 1851, the leading Methodist William Harris Rule published his *Martyrs of the Reformation*, drawing substantially on Foxe, but also extending his narrative to include extensive accounts of persecution of continental Protestants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rule acknowledged that 'few persons, indeed have been solemnly martyred, for the sake of Christ, within the present century', but he believed that while Roman Catholic methods might have changed, their objective of suppressing the true Christian gospel remained.⁴⁴ Clearly during these decades publishers as well as authors were confident that Protestant martyrs had a substantial appeal to a wide range of different markets.

One widespread feature of these books was the dramatic woodcuts of burnings. The Protestant polemicist Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, who herself published an abridgement of Foxe in 1837, recalled that during her childhood in the 1790s her father gave her an old folio edition of Foxe:

I could not, it is true, decipher the black letter, but ... every wood-cut was examined with aching eyes and a palpitating heart. Assuredly I took in more of the spirit of John Foxe, even by that imperfect mode of acquaintance, than many do by reading his book through; and when my father next found me at what became my darling study, I looked up at him with burning cheeks and asked, 'Papa, may I be a martyr?'⁴⁵

Charlotte Elizabeth was an unusual child and her reaction to the images was a characteristically extreme one. Nevertheless, the incident is revealing evidence of the readiness of parents to regard Foxe as appropriate reading for their offspring, and of the lasting impression that it could make on children. Moreover, her staunchly Protestant father responded to her childish naïve question, by observing 'if the government ever gives power to the Papists again ... you may very probably live to be a martyr'.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, monuments were erected to Protestant martyrs, most famously in Oxford between 1838 and 1843, to commemorate the burning of Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley. As Andrew Atherstone has demonstrated, the Oxford Martyrs Memorial was in its origins as much a reflection of resurgent antagonism to Roman Catholicism as a protest against the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement.⁴⁶ Exactly contemporary with it was the martyrs memorial on the Scores in St Andrews, which commemorated George Wishart and other pioneers of the Scottish Reformation. Monuments to commemorate local burnings of Protestants continued to appear in the first decade of the twentieth century: for example, in Exeter in 1908 and in Coventry in 1910.