

What if my father had been born Ugandan, either black or Indian? He, to say the least, is socialist, so would have been highly likely to fall victim to the atrocities of Idi Amin, being a contemporary. I consequently would not have had a life nurtured by state care and education (not that I made too much of the latter!) or been carefree under the reign of a benign monarch. However, I do not find “what-if?” questions of any particular benefit or point, so why muse on this one?

17th February this year is the 40th anniversary of the martyrdom of Janani Luwum, Archbishop of Uganda from 1974-77. His murder - almost without question on the orders of Amin - was as a direct result of his criticism of the Amin regime and its excesses, especially the mass disappearances and murders of hundreds of thousands of Ugandans. Janani’s Christian leadership, indeed, his personal discipleship, required of him to be the voice of protest against the unGodliness of such injustices.

It is sobering for me to dwell on the contemporaneousness that the archbishop’s life had to my own. He was born the same year as my father, he was made priest the same year I was born, he was made bishop the year I enlisted, and he was murdered the year my first son was born. So, if you ever thought martyrdom had slipped into the annals of distant history, may I suggest that the need for martyrdom is the lot of any Christian in any age - and thank God that there are few of us whose calling requires so much.

“Martyrdom” simply means “witness” (another of those Greek etymologies). As Christians we are called: first, to bear witness to that which is Christlike; second, to bear witness against that which is not Christlike. That is to say, we are required to love one another as Jesus loved us and to testify to the truth of God’s Spirit.

How did he love us? Clearly, he died for us; also, though, he made the stance to bear witness to Godly living. We all have some idea of what that might be - don’t we? Be clear: it is not in false displays of piousness; rather, it is in fair and kind regard of one another, with appropriate humility, ever mindful that we witness for God - who also witnesses to us. Pray that this society remains a place where that can continue to happen for all.