

EXTRACTS FROM REMEMBRANCE DAY SERMON OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND
PRIMATE, THE MOST REVEREND DR. R.H.A. EAMES, ARCHBISHOP OF
ARMAGH, IN ST. MACARTAN'S CATHEDRAL, ENNISKILLEN

N.B. EMBARGO : 8 NOVEMBER 1987, 11.30 A.M.

Today there are voices which ask : do we need to go on remembering?
There are others which ask : if we have to remember, what do we remember?

Generations have grown up for whom two world wars are only pages in a history book or films on T.V. Each year the numbers of those who recall vividly the events of 1914-18 and 1939-45 grow smaller. Each year the human memories of the devastation of those wars become more dim. Each year the men and women who served in those wars grow older. To-day nations which fought and sacrificed so much co-operate in world agreements, world trade and people travel freely across frontiers which once were stained with blood. To-day the world has moved on : old tensions have been replaced by new tensions but so many old suspicions have been replaced by efforts at international brotherhood. The young people of the world meet at so many international levels and there is sometimes acute embarrassment when anyone dares to bring up the subject of those wars generations ago.

But human nature has not changed. There are still those who seek to enforce their will on others by force or violence. International efforts to promote peace abound but there are still those who speak of domination or victory. We can still glimpse some of those human characteristics which led to the slaughter and devastation of another age.

To-day we like to think that structures exist which will allow nations to talk about problems rather than fight about them : to negotiate terms and settlements rather than instigate invasion or sneak attack : to reach agreement around a conference table rather than enforce victory through bomb or bullet.

Wars and violence are often the outcome of failure or inefficiency by the world's political leaders. War takes over when political ideas or political dialogue fail. Violence is usually as much a comment on the failure of political leadership as it is a manifestation of human weakness or frustration.

Tragically here in Northern Ireland we are reminded too often of those who made the supreme sacrifice because of the uniforms they wear. The sacrifice of members of the U.D.R., the army or the police while on security duty is just as real, just as sad and just as significant as that of those young men and women who died in time of world war. The sacrifice is all the more poignant because it is made on their own native soil rather than on the fields of Flanders or the beaches of Normandy.

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Our own local community is not allowed to forget the price paid by those who live in danger that others may live in safety.

The real strength and justification for Remembrance Sunday lies far beyond details of two world conflicts even though those wars are at the centre of our thinking to-day. To-day we pause to remember with gratitude those who gave their lives in conflicts which cost the world so much. But let us also remember that history has shown us the futility of war, the utter waste of war, the indescribable sorrow of war - and let us recognise the completely negative nature of violence itself.

Perhaps the passing of time has compelled us all to give a new emphasis to a resolve to do all in our power to replace suspicion with understanding, conflict with dialogue, division with honesty and truth.

Let the world go on recalling this aspect of remembrance as we remember with humble silence those who gave their lives for others.

So, do we need to go on remembering and what do we remember?

I cannot escape the conclusion that if a nation or a people forget those whose lives were sacrificed for ideals or the defence of freedom in time of war or emergency then that nation, that people, will be the poorer. Beyond the statistics of the fallen or the numbers of those who still carry on their minds and bodies the scars of war lies the stark human truth : war is a tragedy, war is a waste, war is the ultimate negative.

It is the lessons of war as much as the statistics of war we remember to-day. There are human values which must be protected. Freedom, justice, democracy and truth are principles which must be defended. Let mankind remember today the cost paid by those who tried to defend those principles but let us all ask another question - what have we done with the freedom they died for?

Just as important as this day is for remembrance it is equally vital as a moment to realise the consequences of failure to settle disputes between peoples by political dialogue and the consequences of allowing situations to develop when statesmanship and sound political leadership fails.

Let those generations which did not know the ravage of war think today of the lessons of history. Let all of us in Northern Ireland recognise again the price too many have been asked to pay for the defence of decency, normality and freedom.
