

Lest We Forget!
Remembering War and Those Who Opposed War

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Memory is one of the things that makes us human. We are the past made present. We carry within ourselves not only the genetic heritage of our parents and ancestors, but memories from the past both inherited and experienced. These memories continue to shape and influence us. We are re-membering people!

For Christians, the actions of breaking and sharing bread and drinking from a common cup of wine, are part of a ritual that defines who we are. ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ was the instruction of Jesus to his followers. The church is a remembering community, linked in the present with the long chain of people who have broken bread and shared wine, going back to an upper room in the first century. But remembering is not only backward looking; it’s an action in the present that has a proleptic or anticipatory dimension. For Christians, the Eucharistic observance is undertaken, as the words of the institution indicate, ‘in remembrance of me’. But Eucharist also has a forward looking aspect: ‘For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.’

I want to suggest that remembering war and those who opposed war have many of the powerful characteristics associated with memory. We encounter the past through memory and ritual action in the present. The ways in which we do this shape and influence how we go forward into the future. We are, as I’ve suggested, the past made present. In what I am going to say I want to draw on personal, communal and national memories about war and try to explore the ways in which our engagement with our past, both individual and collective, presents ongoing challenges for us in the present.

I begin with a personal memory. The earliest memory I have, is of my father coming home from the army. The year was 1946, and I was three. I remember my sister taking my brother and me down to a particular place to wait for my father to come up from the Railway Station. Although he was over forty, my father volunteered. Because of a gammy knee, he was declared as unfit for overseas service and ended up as part of the Home Guard, ‘protecting’ New Zealand; and, because of the man-power shortage, he worked in the army on farms in Canterbury during the summer to help bring in the harvest. Many of the children I went to school with had fathers who had served overseas and so the sense of living in the shadow of the Second World War was strong.

Growing up in a small community, ANZAC Day in the 1950s was a solemn and sacred day. The youth organisation, of which I was a member, attended the ecumenical Protestant service, usually held in the local picture theatre led by the local ministers. Then we marched from one direction – and Catholics, who had been

attending a separate service in their own church, marched from another direction. We met outside the Wall Memorial Hall which housed the offices of the RSA. There a civic service was held, with the Mayor presiding, and usually a low ranked army officer would speak and one of the local ministers would lead prayers. There would be the firing of volleys (which scared the wits out of me), by a unit of cadets from the local high school; then the laying of wreaths. The old soldiers and youth organisations would march off, led by the local municipal brass band the short distance to the clock tower. This was erected in memory of those who had taken part in what I then knew as the Boer War, but would now refer to as the Anglo-Boer War or the South African War! There were still some survivors from that war present at the parades in the early 1950s. After laying more wreaths and further volleys the parade would march some distance to the local recreation ground. There at the Cenotaph more wreaths were laid and volleys fired. The cenotaph listed those from the local community who were killed in the First and Second World Wars. The old soldiers would then march to the RSA for a day of reminiscing, aided no doubt by liquid refreshment. The rest of the parade would disband.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in these acts of commemoration. They were repeated throughout the length and breadth of the country. ANZAC Day developed its own rituals – a mixture of funereal sadness and grief – expressions of patriotism and national identity – a strange mixture of religious symbolism and language rooted in the Bible, Christian hymns such as ‘Eternal Father Strong to Save and ‘God of Bethel’, prayers and civic pride (what I later came to understand as a form of civil-religion). There was a looking back to South Africa, the First and Second World Wars and some acknowledgment of war in Korea and then later in the fifties, Malaya. The ANZAC Day rituals were an expression of community solidarity with a strange intermingling of militarism and vague hopes about peace.

As children we were very aware of war, but had little sense of its horror. A stream of books and films in the fifties such as *The Cruel Sea*, *The Dam Busters*, *The Wooden Horse*, *The Great Escape*, and *Colditz Castle*, gave young children a rather Boys’ Own, romanticised heroic view of war. I certainly didn’t appreciate what war meant. Bill, a first cousin of my father, was a survivor of the First World War. He was an alcoholic, a petty criminal, an outsider or ‘Man Alone’ figure. We all knew that he had been gassed during the war, but we didn’t really understand what that meant. Bill never married. He lived in shacks on the edge of the town. He would turn up occasionally at church on a Sunday and we would hear him snoring in a back pew during the sermon. We always knew that meant that my mother, bless her, would invite Bill up to share our dinner. Bill was an odd man out. It was only as an adult that I realised that Bill was not only a survivor of the First World War but also a victim of the war. Those men who marched on ANZAC Day wearing their medals; and Bill was one of them, carried memories of war which shaped their lives. They did not talk about the horrors. It was not until the remnant of First World War survivors were in their eighties that some of them began to talk of the awfulness of Gallipoli, the Somme, Messines and Passchendale. The 12th of October is the ninety-second anniversary of the huge losses New Zealand sustained in the mud at Passchendale

with over 2,700 casualties and over 800 of these killed or mortally injured. Cecil Burgess is quoted as saying, 'I went home to a father, a mother and four sisters and no one ever asked me what it was like. For seventy years no one ever asked me what it was like.'¹

The memories of those who opposed war were hardly visible in the community in which I grew up. I had little awareness of the voices of dissent or of people of conscience who had opposed war. There were what we saw as strange religious groups like the Cooneyites and Jehovah Witnesses who wouldn't stand for the national anthem and whose young men were exempt from compulsory military training. It wasn't until the late 1950s that I heard about the Riverside Community and the alternative Christian voice against war that represented. The publicity given to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the late 1950s gave prominence to people who opposed war. But they were dismissed by the media and by politicians. It wasn't until the late sixties with the anti-Vietnam war protests that the anti-war and pro-peace sentiment began to gain ground.

When I left school I worked for three years on the administrative staff of a psychiatric hospital, and then as a university student I spent long vacations male nursing in psychiatric hospitals. I again encountered victims of both World Wars – men who spent the whole of their lives after serving overseas in institutional care. One of them, a stretcher bearer in the First World War, was awarded the Military Cross. He never spoke, although he could understand everything you said. I couldn't imagine the horrors which he had seen. And yet men had come back from both World Wars and been expected to reintegrate into New Zealand society as if nothing had changed. There was no post traumatic stress counselling for them; no organised programmes to help those struggling with mental and social readjustment haunted by the horrors of war. The rituals surrounding ANZAC Day were the public acknowledgement of their service and those who had been killed in war.

As a country we've been proud of the contribution we've made to war in terms of the numbers who have fought. We've also recognised the cost this has involved in terms of the number of people killed. Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips' book, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials* sum up this in the dual dimensions of 'sorrow and pride' - grief and honour.² War memorials are ubiquitous in the New Zealand landscape. They are permanent reminders of past conflicts and what those wars have cost families in terms of sons, fathers, brothers and uncles. Jay Winter, in his study of the First World War within the context of 'European Cultural History' entitled his book, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*. The individual name on a memorial is both a site of memory and mourning. But the individual name is listed among the tens, hundreds and even in some cases, thousands of other names, pointing to the way in which these sites of memory and mourning are both individual and communal memorials. They are surrogate tombstones for both the dead and their grieving relatives. They are sites which express the involvement of nations in war and perpetuate the memory of those who fought and died.

As a way of giving some structure to my presentation I will look at three types of memorials that Winter draws attention to and attempt to relate these to my subtitle – “Remembering war and those who opposed it”.³

1. War Museums – Anti-War Museums – Peace Museums
2. Memorials in churches and civic sites
3. War cemeteries

War Museums – Anti-War Museums – Peace Museums

Winter identifies with the first type the ‘heroic images of war’ which served both to commemorate and to encourage ‘citizenship in wartime’ and the ongoing support of war. He points to the decision to found the Imperial War Museum in 1917, initially at the Crystal Palace, and then, ironically ‘on the grounds of the former “Bedlam” lunatic asylum’.⁴ The use of museums to perpetuate the memory of a nation’s contribution to war through ‘housing military objects, and records’, ‘photographs, manuscripts, books, works of art’ is seen closest to home in the Auckland War Memorial Museum, the Waiouru War Museum, or the Australian War Memorial Museum in Canberra. These are primarily ‘War Museums’, rather than say, ‘Peace Museums’. Contrast them with Ernst Friedrich’s Anti-war Museum in Berlin, which he set up in 1924. Winter notes that the Berlin Museum’s ‘collection of documents and gruesome photographs showed everything the patriotic collections omitted.’⁵ While noticing the bias of both the War Museums and the Anti-war Museum, Winter points to the way in which ‘both arose out of prior political commitments. Commemoration was a political act; it could not be neutral’.⁶

Friedrich’s first museum was destroyed by Nazis in 1933, indicating that the subversive message of an anti-war museum wasn’t allowed to continue under a fascist regime. He subsequently opened another museum in Belgium and during the Second World War Friedrich joined the French Resistance. He later opened a museum in Paris. In 1988 the Berlin Anti-War Museum was opened with a Peace Gallery. The naming is significant, going beyond the anti-war sentiment into the pro-peace approach. Those who opposed war were pro-peace, but as with the message of many protestors, what they were against was often heard more loudly than what they were for.

How far do War Museums not only serve as sites of memory, but also help perpetuate attitudes, which if not pro-war are certainly not pro-peace? The book about the Auckland War Memorial Museum and New Zealand’s two centuries at war, *Scars on the Heart*, indicates something of the cost of war. But the ambiguities seen in the use of military force to achieve peace are unresolved in the way in which these museums commemorate past martial glories and defeats, without denouncing war itself as an evil to be avoided. There is a question as to how far memorialisation in such a museum helps to normalise war and make it acceptable, or how far it challenges the glorification of war. There is an ambiguity here. In recent years there has been a shift in focus. Currently, for example, the Auckland Museum is showing the six-part series, *Apocalypse: The Second World War* which does not hold back on the horrors of war.

There are a whole series of questions which can be raised about the inter-relationship of memory, museums, war and peace.

War Memorials

Winter's second site of memory is the war memorial. They are an international phenomenon that has flourished particularly over the last 150 years. In listing names they express the honour given to volunteers; they enshrine the cult of patriotism seen in going to fight and die for your country; they powerfully evoke the commitment made by communities in support of imperial causes; they are evocative sites of gathering to commemorate and remember the deeds of those who fought and in particular those who died. War memorials in New Zealand go all the way from the national and state, civic and public memorials, the humble honours board in churches and schools, to the small towns with their statues, cenotaphs and memorial gates with their lists of names.

New Zealand's National War Memorial in Wellington carries many of the ambiguities associated with the public memorialisation of war. It acts as a national shrine. Clergy from the Anglican Cathedral in Wellington, acting as a chaplain to the nation, play an important part in the annual ANZAC Day service at the National War Memorial. The military precision of the honour guard and the laying of wreaths by members of the diplomatic corps are caught up with prayers using Christian formulas and the evocation of national identity.

The building itself is not a church but is described as 'a Hall of Memories'. In the vestibule under the Union Jack and the New Zealand ensign there are plaques with the words:

Let all men know that this is holy ground.
This shrine commemorates our people's fortitude and sacrifice,
therefore give remembrance.

They gave their lives for their country, that we might live in peace.

The hall of memories has six recesses or 'mini-chapels' with 'plaques of remembrances' for the forces in which people served. Carved above what is described as 'the Sanctuary', an interesting appropriation of religious language, are doves of peace and words from Psalm 139:

If I climb up into Heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in Hell, behold thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me.

‘The focal point of the Hall, [is] sculptor Lynden Smith's statue *Mother and Children*.... The statue is both a gentle and powerful image of the suffering and burden carried by a family during time of war.’⁷ There is no glorification of war in this representation. The statue is flanked by two large brass urns, Greek symbols of death. Two columns at the front are inscribed with ‘the coats of arms of members of the Commonwealth’ and they are both surmounted by ‘a cross in bronze and glass’. In the Hall of Memories there is a syncretistic mixture of classical, Biblical, Christian, national, and military imagery. The language and symbolism surrounding memory and remembrance of war is charged with multiple meanings and ambiguities. The potential message of peace can very easily be swallowed up by sacrificial, patriotic and militaristic dimensions, which these memorials enshrine.

Outside the Hall of Memories is the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, where the body of a New Zealand First World War soldier was entombed in November 2004. What amounted to a state funeral service in the Anglican Cathedral has been described as ‘probably the largest commemorative programme ever undertaken in New Zealand’.⁸ Memorialising the war dead, as Winter suggested, is a very powerful political act. The combination of ritual associated with memorials, with its mixture of Christian, military, civic and national symbols and rhetoric is a potent force that has been used in various ways in our history. In the late sixties and early seventies, for example, there was great outrage when protestors used ANZAC Day rituals at public memorials to challenge New Zealand’s involvement in the Vietnam War. The cries for peace were heard by many as dishonouring the memory of those who had died in war. There is a question as to how far the almost cultic aspects around our memorialisation of war can prevent or enhance the promotion of peace. Again there is a whole series of questions which could be asked around this.

In the face of the hundreds of war memorials and the annual rituals associated with memorialisation, how are the voices and memories of those who opposed war, who promoted peace, kept alive? Where are the monuments to the pacifists, the conscientious objectors, the defaulters in New Zealand? What are the rituals which help keep alive their memory? Where in our churches or cathedrals do we have monuments, memorials, honour boards, stained glass windows that memorialise those who opposed war? There could well be some places – I am keen to know about them. Interestingly, the name of Ormond Burton is on the Honours Board of St Luke’s Presbyterian Church, Auckland, remembered as a soldier, not as New Zealand’s leading pacifist.

Memorialisation, as I’ve said, is highly political. Alan Brash, the noted ecumenist and Presbyterian minister, himself a Pacifist, told me how he and his father after the Second World War put forward a motion in the Presbyterian General Assembly supporting the reinstatement of the civil rights to those who were ‘Defaulters’ and had been incarcerated in Detention Camps. He was disgusted when the procedural motion to pass to the next business was accepted. His disgust arose not from losing a debate, but because the church had chosen to avoid debating what was a very sensitive issue with the presence of so many recently Returned Servicemen in its ranks.

Suggesting the memorialisation in a church of those once described as ‘defaulters’ would probably still not be a way of winning a popularity poll. The irony is that in cathedrals and churches, whose congregations follow the prince of peace, those who have fought in war are remembered, but those who took the other costly road and stood up for peace are usually ignored. When the church acts as ‘chaplain to the nation’ there is a narrow line between condoning war and proclaiming peace. Archbishop Robert Runcie at the National Service of Thanksgiving at the end of the Falklands War incurred the wrath of Margaret Thatcher when he prayed for the dead on both sides of the conflict. Coventry Cathedral, with its ministry of reconciliation, arising out of the ashes of the cathedral’s destruction in a bombing raid, offers a very positive example of constructive memorialisation.

Another counter-cultural model is the Peace Abbey in Sherborn, Massachusetts, a multi-faith retreat centre founded in 1988. In the Conference Center, they have what is described as

The Pacifist Living History Museum, containing relics, personal affects, manuscripts and documents placed at the Abbey by members of the Peace Movement, friends and supporters. Each Sunday morning from 10 to 11 AM ... [they] hold a prayer and meditation service in the Quaker room on the first floor of the Conference Center. ... It is a time for those who have been involved in the work of peace and social justice to renew, connect and share the sense of peace that comes through gathered silence.⁹

They have a poignant memorial to the ‘Unknown Civilians Killed in War’ – a reminder of the millions of victims of warfare who are not memorialised or remembered and the ways in which war memorials are a very masculine construction of memory. On what is called the Conscientious Objectors Hill at Sherborn they have placed a granite Memorial Stone inscribed with the words:

MAY HONOR BE BESTOWED ON THESE CONSCIENTIOUS
OBJECTORS WHO WALKED THE EARTH SPEADING THE TRADITION
OF NONVIOLENCE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS.¹⁰

Where are the memorials in New Zealand that help keep alive the witness of people who opposed war? When I was growing up in Hokitika I was unaware that the Hokitika gaol was one of the three sites in the South Island that the Parihaka ploughmen were brought to after they were arrested. The community led by Te Whiti and Tohu in the 1870’s and 1880’s offered an alternative pathway to the violence and wars of the 1860’s. The passive resistance of the people at Parihaka resulted in many of the men being taken away to Lyttleton, Dunedin and Hokitika where they were unjustly imprisoned. The remembrances in stone in these three places erected a few years ago are a silent witness today to the alternative pathway to violence. The Parihaka International Peace Festival, which has been running for the last five years, has become a contemporary vehicle for keeping alive the memory of the Parihaka

prophets as well as reaching out to the future with its commitment to peace and sustainability.

Wellington City was declared in 1993 by Mayor Fran Wilde as a 'Peace Capital'. The City has been active in memorialising peace. It 'has ... planted a number of trees, and installed a range of sculptures and monuments, commemorating peace and peacemakers' on what is called the Wellington Peace Walk. These are some examples:

'A stone from the former Hiroshima Town Hall is a gift from the city of Hiroshima. It commemorates the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and the hope that nuclear weapons are never used again.'

'Chris Booth's 1991 sculpture "Peacemaker" comprises basalt boulders given by the Ngati Kura iwi of Northland. Peacemaker particularly attempts to communicate the choice of being peaceful among human beings. This is a companion sculpture to one in Matauri Bay, Northland, commemorating the final resting place of the Rainbow Warrior – the peace ship bombed by the French Secret Service.'

A plaque honouring Wellington as a Peace Capital City was installed at Cuba Mall in 1995.

At Te Aro Park, on the corners of Dixon and Manners Streets, there is a sculpture 'Designed in the shape of a waka (Maori canoe) representing the fact that all peoples of Aotearoa-New Zealand have migrated here from other countries.' This place was a 'Traditional site of protests against war and in favour of peace.' [Ormond Burton, for example, was a frequent speaker in the place.]¹¹

Poets, writers and artists have often led the way in giving voice and expression to peace. The First World War poetry of men like Wilfrid Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, and the homespun rhymes of Studdert Kennedy, often with Christian imagery, savagely remind people of the horrors of war. For whatever reason, New Zealand does not seem to have produced its own soldier poets. But there are the lesser known pacifist poets of the Second World War like the one time Presbyterian minister, Basil Dowling. James K. Baxter, son of the notable opponent of war, Archibald Baxter, occasionally used his enormous talent to attack war. In one of his most poignant and savage poems, *The Gunner's Lament*, about a dying Maori soldier in Vietnam he ends with the searing lines:

And go and tell Keith Holyoake
Sitting in Wellington,
However long he scrubs his hands
He'll never get them clean.¹²

Ironically, as Barry Gusaftson's indicates, Holyoake was sensitive to the protests and did his best to withstand American pressure and keep New Zealand's involvement in Vietnam to a minimum.

In the area of fiction we have produced few notable opponents of war who can seize the imagination and inspire readers with the alternative vision of a peaceful world. Maurice Gee's character, Plumb, based on his grandfather, the onetime Salvation Army Officer, Presbyterian then Unitarian minister, J.H.G. Chapple, is not a very attractive figure. Chapple was a pacifist and opposed the First World War. He spent eleven months in gaol for 'seditious utterance'. Chapple's socialism and attraction in the 1930s towards Russian communism alienated him from many.

Ray Grover, in what Gee commends as 'likely to be judged our best war novel yet', *March to the Sound of the Guns*, gives a sympathetic portrayal of soldiers caught up with the fighting in the First World War. James Gibb, the minister at St John's Presbyterian Church in Wellington, has a prominent part in the novel. Gibb is depicted using his pulpit as a recruiting platform. Gradually as the war comes to its end, Gibb adopts a strongly held pacifism that continued to mould his ministry until his death. One of the main characters, Harry the Christian sniper, returns home and becomes a minister. He is given the last chapter of the novel, ending with the words, 'There it was. A true follower of our Lord must be an apostle of love and labour for peace.'¹³

In our non-fiction we have a large library of volumes that tell the story of those who opposed war and promoted peace. Archibald Baxter's classic, *We Will Not Cease*; Ormond Burton's writings; numerous autobiographical accounts by defaulters; biographies such as Ernest Crane's account of Ormond Burton, *I can do no other*; histories of conscientious objectors and pacifism by Elsie Locke and David Grant. In the area of television and film we have the moving account of Rita Graham in *War Stories*; Russell Campbell's very powerful documentary, *Sedition: The Suppression of Dissent in World War II New Zealand*; Barry Barclay's horrific account of the destruction of the Moriori on Rekohu (the Chatham Islands), *The Feathers of Peace*. The story of dissent against war and the forces brought by those who opposed them are there for people to find. My concern is, how far are these stories woven into our national consciousness? The war dead have their memorials and days of remembrance. Christian Pacifists and all those who opposed war were part of a small minority, who while not invisible, are easily overwhelmed by the mainstream public memorialisation associated with war.

Our national art was still in its infancy when the Second World War broke out. In the paintings of Rita Angus, we have some bold statements of her own commitment to pacifism. Much of her art, however, was held in her own collection until after her death, and so it did not have much impact on the public. Her paintings are a reminder today of what she and people like her were willing to stand up for. Angus' pacifism originated from a combination of socialist and Christian influences. Jill Trevelyan describes *Dona Nobis Pacem* (Grant us Peace) as 'the most overt expression of her pacifist vision'. She depicts the English pacifist composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams,

who was her friend Douglas Lilburn's tutor. Williams composed a cantata, *Dona Nobis Pacem* in 1936.¹⁴ The painting of the apple and the Nelson landscape in the bottom right is probably a reference back to the Riverside Community established in 1942 where Angus worked for a period during the war. A painting like this, when it is seen within the context of Angus' life, takes the viewer into her opposition to war. As she wrote in 1944: "My pacifism and my paintings are now closely linked, I hope all my life."¹⁵ Angus at some personal cost resisted the attempt to manpower her into an essential industry, declaring: "I believe that in living, is the task of peace, and not killing, which is war. If men and women gave to the creation of life, and not to destruction, the peoples of this world would live in greatness, without false ideals."¹⁶

In the paintings of artists like Lois White, Colin McCahon, Ralph Hotere, Gil Hanley and Nigel Brown there are statements against war, its horror and its destructive force. Artists, poets and writers, are often the visionaries who enable us to see alternative possibilities. They help keep alive for us the memory of those who campaigned for peace.

War Cemeteries

Jay Winter has a third site of memory – the war cemeteries. In New Zealand, fortunately, we do not have the vast cemeteries that crowd northern France. But we do have some significant sites of memory where soldiers who were killed in conflict are buried. The disastrous Northern War in the Bay of Islands in 1844-1845 can be recalled in the graveyards at St John's Church at Waimate North and St Michael's Ohaewai. The Wars of the 1860s are memorialised at: St John's Te Awamutu where soldiers killed at Rangiorhia are buried; at All Saints, Howick; at Te Papa, the Mission at Tauranga where both Maori and Pakeha soldiers who were killed at Gate Pa are remembered; and at St Mary's New Plymouth. At St Mary's there are 'Tombstones in the Churchyard; memorials in the Church in the form of Hatchments of the various Regiments and the "Friendly Maori", and a Memorial to the Maori whose conflict with the settlers we have come to recognise had a need to be understood and recognised justly, all bear witness to this troubled time.'¹⁷ These memorials are part of our own history. As sites of memory, my question is, how do they help us understand the past proleptically so that we can live more justly in the present and into the future?

In the last ten years or so I have visited a number of war cemeteries in France, Flanders, Turkey, Greece and Italy. Initially the visits began as a search for two great uncles – my wife's Uncle Horace, who served at Gallipoli, was invalided off to Lemnos, made well enough to go to fight in France, and was killed at the Somme; and my great Uncle Alfred who was killed at Messines in 1917. Both Horace and Alfred's bodies were never found and identified. Their names appear on memorial walls rather than a named headstone and could possibly lie under a ubiquitous memorial with the words: 'A soldier of the Great War Known Only to God'. At Kaiapoi, where Alfred lived, his name appears on the town memorial. The Commonwealth War Grave's

Commission, which has been crucial in building and maintaining war cemeteries, has virtual memorials such as this one to my great uncle, for all Commonwealth soldiers.

In Memory of
Private ALFRED CHARLES YOUNG
16035, West Coast Coy. 1st Bn., Wellington Regiment, N.Z.E.F.
who died age 32
on 08 June 1917
Son of Mrs. M. A. Young, of Smith St., Kaiapoi, Christchurch.
Remembered with honour
MESSINES RIDGE (N.Z.) MEMORIAL¹⁸

The war cemeteries were intended to bring comfort to the grieving and be a permanent record of the death and sacrifice of those killed.

The visits of Australasian young people to Gallipoli in recent years have become almost a rite of passage and a necessary part of the great OE. For me there was something almost surreal seeing the Sphinx from which Turkish soldiers shot down on the ANZACs coming across North Beach where the annual commemorations are now held. The famous words of the Turkish General Kemal Ataturk, who made his reputation at Gallipoli, point to the futility of war

Those heroes who shed their blood and lost their lives, you are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us where they lie side by side in this country of ours. You, the mothers who sent their sons from far away countries wipe away your tears, your sons are now lying in our bosoms and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they become our sons as well.

It was salutary to stand at Chunuk Bair where Colonel Malone and the Wellington Regiment gained a sight of the Dardanelles in the distance only to be repulsed and killed. ‘They came from the ends of the earth’ – for what – one can cynically ask? The sense of the waste of life I experienced in visiting Tynecot, the Passchendale Cemetery, was also my experience at Chunuk Bair.

There is a quiet beauty at many of the war cemeteries with the headstones lined up with military precision. But this can’t erase the sense of horror that they evoke as you survey the ages of those who died. At Casino the Commonwealth War Cemetery is overlooked by the rebuilt Benedictine Monastery which the Allies bombed. The Cross of Sacrifice is invested with all the pathos of the death of Jesus and yet the connection between a man crucified by Roman soldiers and the death of soldiers in combat is somewhat forced. In order to justify war, we have developed a rhetoric which co-opts Jesus, the Prince of Peace. One headstone particularly drew my attention. The Revd A.K.C. Harper was a student at this College and the only New Zealand chaplain to be killed in the Second World War. His name appears on a brass plaque in the St John’s College chapel. Chaplains carrying the insignia of the cross and the crown sum up

something of the ambiguity, paradox or even contradiction that goes with those who have offered the ministry of Christ to soldiers. A supreme irony for me was going up to Monte Casino and being faced with its entrance way with the Benedictine motto – Pax. The rebuilding of the monastery is itself a testament to Peace and the alternative gospel way to the way of war.

At Maleme on Crete there was another delightful incongruous moment with the sign reading ‘Late Minoan Tholos Tomb’ dating back to some three and half thousand years ago above the sign pointing to the German War Cemetery. The tombs of a previous era have become an archaeological site. As time passes, I wonder what will become of the twentieth century war cemeteries? Above the airstrip where the New Zealand soldiers were repulsed, the bodies of German dead were not interred until 1971 and the cemetery consecrated in 1973. Coming to terms with the dead, particularly those who were seen as the invaders, was a long and painful business for the people of Crete. What was of particular interest to me was the signage which included words of Albert Schweitzer, who won the Noble peace prize for his missionary work: ‘The soldier’s graves are the greatest preachers of peace’; and ‘The dead of this cemetery admonish to peace.’

Growing up in the shadow of the Second World War I was exposed to a type of memorialisation that was deeply rooted in the felt needs for community solidarity, national identity and patriotic sacrifice. I don’t want to disown the choices made by previous generations but I’ve wanted to learn from them. Ormond Burton, I understand, paraded on ANZAC Day with the old soldiers. In his books on *The Auckland Regiment* and *The Silent Division* he tells with the graphic eye of a participant the war in which he fought. He does add, however, to *The Silent Division* his own uncompromising testimony to peace and the new way that he sought to bring through his commitment to Pacifism. He held together remembrance of the past and active pursuit of a better way.

Memorials to Peace

The memorials to the dead in war are not only sites of memory but can become sites of peace if we work to make sure that further names are not added to them. Those who opposed war probably would not want their names kept alive on memorials, in statues or stained glass. There is some value, however, in having an honours board for those who opposed war and promoted peace, even on a web site, lest their memory be forgotten. In *All the Saints*, which gives information about those listed in the New Zealand Anglican Calendar there is material for ANAZC Day on the 25 April, and a day entitled ‘Prayers for Peace’ although with no designated day. The calendar includes people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer who died as a result of his implication the bomb plot against Hitler, Maximilian Kolbe the Catholic priest who took the place of someone else in going to the gas chambers, Heni Te Kiri Karamu who supplied water to soldiers dying at the Battle of Gate Pa, Te Whiti o Rongomai the great Parihaka prophet of peace, Henare Taratoa who carried with him battle instructions based on

the New Testament, and Wiremu Tamihana who valiantly sought peace in the face of Pakeha aggression. In the spirit of the Methodist and Anglican covenant, what would it mean to include people like Ormond and Helen Burton or Archibald Barrington; or Anglicans like Charles Chandler the Dean of Hamilton who was prominent in his opposition to war, or Thurlow and Kathleen Thompson, noted Anglican pacifist leaders in Christchurch?

A fascinating use of the money given to the New Zealand by the French Government in compensation for the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior is the website – Lest We Forget – Remembering Peacemakers on ANZAC Day. The following are the names of those who are listed on this site with biographical information:¹⁹

A. Lois White
Alan Graham
Archibald Baxter
John Miller
Malcolm Kendall-Smith
Merv Browne and Chris Palmer
Ormond Burton
Rod Donald
Rua Kenana
Te Whiti o Rongomai
The Families of Conscientious Objectors
Moana Cole

As Christians we are shaped and moulded far more than we often realise by the ritual activities in which we engage. Memory – ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ – Action ‘Whenever you break this bread and drink this cup you remember me’ – looking back to the past from our position in the present to go forward into the future - that is part of the challenge of good liturgy. Shirley Murray in her hymn for ANZAC Day has provided words that honour both those who fought and those who opposed war.

*Honour the dead, our country's fighting brave,
honour our children left in foreign grave,
where poppies blow and sorrow seeds her flowers,
honour the crosses marked forever ours.*

*Weep for the places ravaged by our blood,
weep for the young bones buried in the mud,
weep for the powers of violence and greed,
weep for the deals done in the name of need.*

*Honour the brave whose conscience was their call,
answered no bugle, went against the wall,
suffered in prisons of contempt and shame,
branded as cowards in our country's name.*

*Weep for the waste of all that might have been,
Weep for the cost that war has made obscene,
Weep for the homes that ache with human pain,
Weep that we ever sanction war again.*

*Honour the dream for which our nation bled,
Held now in trust to justify the dead,
Honour their vision on this solemn day,
Peace known in freedom, peace the only way.*²⁰

Shirley Murray writes about how Ormond Burton's address to a student conference she attended was the inspiration for this hymn. She concludes: 'Whenever you sing this hymn, don't focus only on the past - think of what you can do for positive peacemaking in your lifetime, and respect those who will never commit themselves to killing another family's son or daughter in warfare.'²¹

The most significant memorial to those who opposed war and who promoted peace, is to continue to work for what they lived and worked for.

¹ Quoted on the back cover of, Chris Pugsely, et al, *Scars on the Heart: Two Centuries of New Zealand At War*, Auckland, David Bateman, 1996.

² Christ Maclean and Jock Phillips, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials*, Wellington: Historical Branch, 1990.

³ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.79.

⁴ Winter, p.80.

⁵ Winter, pp.81-82.

⁶ Winter, p.82.

⁷ <http://www.nationalwarmemorial.govt.nz/hall.html>

⁸ <http://www.nationalwarmemorial.govt.nz/tomb.html>

⁹ <http://imaginepeace.com/news/archives/7518>

¹⁰ http://www.peaceabbey.org/memorial/hill_of_remembrance.htm

¹¹ <http://www.peace.net.nz/index.php?pageID=62#pwalk>

¹² J.E. Weir, ed. *Collected Poems of James K. Baxter*, Wellington, Oxford University Press, 1981, p.324.

¹³ Ray Grover, *March to the Sound of the Guns*, Dunedin, Longacre, 2008, p.447.

¹⁴ Jill Trevelyan, *Rita Angus: An Artist's Life*, Wellington, Te Papa Press, 2008, p.178.

¹⁵ Trevelyan, p.178.

¹⁶ Trevelyan, p.184.

¹⁷ <http://www.stmarys.org.nz/stmaryshistory.php>

¹⁸ <http://www.cwgc.org/search/certificate.aspx?casualty=1738438>

¹⁹ <http://lestweforget.org.nz/>

²⁰ © Shirley Erena Murray 2005

²¹ <http://mrn.sa.uca.org.au/component/content/article/531-hymn-for-anzac-day.html>