

## **Why I can wear a red poppy.**

I would not wish to belittle the feelings of Ian Wilson, which are obviously grounded in his own life experiences. Nevertheless, I would like to offer an alternative view, as one who shares the Anabaptist desire to make a peace witness, but who also wishes to be a pastor to those on the fringe.

I will be observing Remembrance Sunday in my church, complete with 2 minutes silence at 11, but there is nothing about this that supports war. As far as I am concerned, it is an opportunity to remember and pray for the sufferings of the bereaved, the refugees, the wounded in body and mind, on all sides, in all conflicts. This is a protest against war, but one that, when conducted in an appropriately dignified way, service personnel and their families can also relate to. (Incidentally, some of the strongest peace activists I have known have been former servicemen.)

With regard to the poppies, I am happy to wear one. As Ian says, the British Legion does good work helping former service personnel. The only criticism that might be made is that it is a disgrace that they have to rely on such charity instead of being helped by the state that has damaged their lives in its service. We are all more aware nowadays of work to help physically disabled ex-service personnel and the no less serious mental damage suffered by the severely traumatised. What is not so publicised is the plight of those, apparently fit, who finish up sleeping rough and often in bondage to drink or drugs, because they cannot adjust to civilian life. For me, wearing the poppy is expressing my solidarity with such and my preparedness to help them. Wearing a white poppy, or the like, might salve our consciences, but we have to ask how it will be perceived by those on the outside.

**Bob Allaway**

## **Why I Won't Be Wearing a Poppy**

**Ian Wilson** of the Bristol Study Group offers us a personal reflection in the build-up to Remembrance Sunday.

I won't be wearing a poppy for Remembrance Sunday. I cannot bring myself to. Every year, I find the whole business of Remembrance, poppies, the two-minutes' silence and all the rest of it extremely upsetting. I find it hard to explain my emotional reaction to it, but I'll try.

I get very angry when I see our political leaders wearing their poppies and laying their wreaths at the Cenotaph. The Royal British Legion website tells us that the annual poppy appeal remembers those who have 'made the ultimate sacrifice'. But the dead service men and women didn't make a sacrifice, they were sacrificed, by generations of political leaders willing to treat the lives of men and women as expendable. Harry Patch, the last British survivor of the First World War, said, 'Politicians who took us to war should have been given the guns and told to settle their differences themselves, instead of organising nothing better than legalised mass murder.' Amen to that.

'Wear your poppy with pride' we were always told. I want to tell the politicians to wear their poppies with shame. Shame that in the 21st century they still can't find a better way of settling differences than war. Shame at the lies they have told us about it. Shame at the blood on their hands. Shame that they refuse to learn the lessons of history. (The First World War was described as the war to end all wars. If only.)

What does it say when churches hold Remembrance Sunday services? And why do some church buildings have old regimental flags hanging up? War is evil. The idea that you can make the world a better place by killing people is evil. The church has no business

endorsing it, legitimising it or blessing it. It is not glorious, or noble. Wilfred Owen was right. We should not:

tell with such high zest  
to children ardent for some  
desperate glory,  
The old lie, *Dulce et Decorum est*  
*Pro patria mori.*

If churches mark Remembrance Sunday, let it be with calls to renounce the evil of war, and prayer for peace.

The UK's annual poppy day appeal is organised by the Royal British Legion, a registered charity. The work they do is impressive, and, unfortunately, very much needed. I have given them money to help support it, but I won't buy and wear a poppy. I can't. And I have a question. If young men and women are killed or disabled because they have been sent to war, why do they and their families have to rely on charity for support? The politicians who send them to war ought to shoulder the responsibility for their welfare and the welfare of their families. In full.

If anyone thinks that I would feel differently if I knew what it was like to have lost someone as a casualty of war, I do know. My own father lies in 'some corner of a foreign field'. His name is on the wall of names at the Armed Forces Memorial' at the National Memorial Arboretum. (I went to see it recently, and I was horrified to see how much space has been left for more names.)

I know that many deny it, but I always feel that Remembrance Sunday and the poppies glorify war. The Cenotaph in Whitehall is even inscribed to 'the glorious dead'. If I wore a poppy I would feel that I was showing solidarity with something that sickens and horrifies me. I just can't. Sorry.