

50 Years after Hiroshima

Today it is 50 years since we dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

What is the difference between the Japanese and ourselves? In 1940 the Japanese felt a mission to spread their rule over the Pacific rim. Last century we saw it as our duty to bring the benefits of British rule to the poor, benighted heathen in Africa, India and the Far East.

The Japanese warrior caste, the Samurai, forfeit their right to be treated as citizens, as people, if they surrender - and they applied this rule as a matter of course to their prisoners and to their subject peoples in a way we find totally unacceptable. We decided to bomb Hiroshima ostensibly to save lives (though approaches for surrender were already being made) but clearly in part at least to see the effect of nuclear weapons on people.

To me it is clear that both sides offended against humanity and a God of Love and while I, and many others, not only Quakers but people of many denominations and faiths, find it difficult to accept that the bombing of Hiroshima (and especially that of Nagasaki) were a justifiable response to aggression, I think we are particularly saddened by the inability of either side to express regret for what they did.

The Japanese cannot see why they should repent for what they did to people who had forfeited their honour - and we cannot see why we should repent for the way we ended a long and bloody war. If no one ever repents how can we ever improve? If you have a brother or sister, do you not remember as a child not wanting to be the first to say sorry? and do you remember how very difficult it was to mean it?

Let us pray that we are enabled grow up soon.

Richard Hilken

BBCRadioDevon Aug 95