

SYMBOL

Later today a radio programme will be broadcast called '*Reclaiming the Swastika.*'

Over many thousands of years the swastika has been used as a symbol and emblem by various religions and cultures.

The writers point out that in the past the meanings of the swastika have been positive: peace, health, good luck and so on.

It was used in America by the Boy Scouts and in advertising products from soft drinks to fruit.

But because of its association with Nazi Germany it is today seen as a negative symbol, and reclaiming it will be difficult - if not impossible.

Symbols are capable of producing an extremely powerful reaction.

Yesterday saw the launch of the 2014 Poppy Appeal and we can expect to see poppies appearing on lapels everywhere over the next few weeks.

It says something about the tremendous power of symbols, that no one is likely to ask a wearer "*What is that?*" despite the fact there are no words or letters on the flower.

Everyone knows that poppies are worn at Remembrance season in order to remember the sacrifices made and lives lost at war. It is a good thing that we look back and show gratitude. But we also need to move forward.

The ancient symbol of the cross is one which reminds Christians of a central event that took place 2000 years ago. The cross reminds us of a moment in history. But it also speaks today of the power of love and of a way of life that followers of Jesus must try to emulate.

The meaning of that symbol is both *past and present*.

In the same way, the poppy reminds us of past occasions and people who are gone. But to truly honour those who went before us we need to look to the future and the need to build a fairer and less violent world.

The challenge for people today is for us to play our part in working for peace by acting as peacemakers wherever we are.

Each of us has the ability to make a difference in this world for good or ill.

Poppies symbolise more than just honouring the past – important though that is. This costs us little.

They need to symbolise our intention and determination to work for a peaceful world wherever we are, and in the way we treat the people around us.

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